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*A TALE FROM NORTHERN CANADA*

BY

T. LUND (CAPT.)

LATE STRATHCONA'S HORSE AND ROYAL AIR FORCE

AUTHOR OF

"WESTON OF THE ROYAL NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE"

LONDON

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# UP NORTH

## CHAPTER I

It was in the early hours of a summer morning at Portage Bend City. The little town, which was snugly tucked away amongst the tall spruces of the Northern Canadian forests, was just commencing to bestir itself. From the stove-pipes of the neat wooden houses white smoke rose lazily into the air, got agitated when it reached the soft breeze which came gently streaming down from the north over the tree-tops, and was gradually bent southwards, drifting away as a fine mist.

Across the blue sky slowly drifted a few white, woolly clouds, behind which the sun played bo-peep from time to time. The only sounds which broke the morning stillness were the distant whines of the saws at the Northern Lumber Company's mills, and the shrill whistling, and clanking of the bell, of a railway engine which was shunting down at the depot.

The town was situated on a level plateau overhanging the Saskatchewan River. A fairly steep, twenty-foot slope led down from the plateau to the low, flat river-bank, past which the wide expanse of water swept slowly and majestically.

Portage Bend was the hub and centre of all activities in the district. Apart from the big lumber interests, there was a brisk transit of men and goods through the town, as it formed the terminus for one of those tentacles which the railway stretches out from its main lines from time to time, to help tapping the

natural resources of the country. Consequently, the trails of trappers, prospectors, traders, and other wanderers of the North-Land converged towards this point. These transient free and easy individuals did not all possess the characteristics which would tend to improve and purify the moral atmosphere of any place; and this had stamped Portage Bend to a certain degree. As one worthy citizen had once been heard to exclaim in a burst of civic pride: "I guess you c'n sin most as much right here in the Bend, as in that there Paris where all them spicy stories come from."

On a street running parallel with Main Street, the chief artery of this northern metropolis, was situated a white, one-story building. A black sign-board with the legend R.N.W.M.P. painted thereon in white letters, and which was fastened over the door, proclaimed to all and sundry that here was one of the strongholds of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. Around and inside the Barracks, as the building was popularly called, there was bustle and activity on this morning. Neatly-packed bundles and boxes were brought out by half-breeds, and carried rapidly in the direction of the river; while in the barrack-room further bundles and packages were still being made up. Anybody, observing these activities, would at once have jumped to the conclusion that some important drive was being launched against some enemies of law and order. But this conclusion would have been utterly erroneous, as the activities of the turbulent elements in the district had not lately been above normal. The simple truth was, that Sergeant Weston was about to lose himself in the wilderness for his three months' leave; and the bundles, boxes, and packages were simply his luggage, stores, and equipment.

When Weston had first given voice to his decision of spending his leave up in the backwoods he had been met with frank and incredulous grins, and any number of "I don't think!"s, on the part of his friends and colleagues; but when he persisted in his protestations the incredulity gave way to an uneasy feeling of wonder and dismay, and there were even

those who questioned the normal state of his mentality. For if he carried out this absurd scheme of his, he would break one of the cherished traditions of the Police!

It had become an established and honoured rule that those members of the Police who hailed from the Old Country should proceed thither when their three months' leave came around, and it had become almost a point of honour for each member to try, at least, to "make the grade." The making of the grade was of course dependent to some extent on the state of the exchequer of each individual and his immediate cronies; but it was at least expected that a determined effort be made; and that these efforts were generally crowned with success the slender roll of those who had been forced to substitute Winnipeg and other of the bigger Canadian cities for London bore ample evidence. And now Sergeant Weston, whose financial standing was more than sound, deliberately set about to break this honoured tradition.

"But, my good fellow, what on earth do you want to bury yourself in the woods for?" had Inspector Trench—the officer commanding the Portage Bend Detachment—inquired of the sergeant as soon as he heard of his decision. "I should think you had a skinful of the North by this time. You seem to have been chasing around up there constantly for the last three or four years."

"That's just it, sir," answered the sergeant with a grin. "I have been chasing around so much that I want to have a quiet time up there for a spell to see what the country is really like. I have long ago picked out an island on Clear Water Lake; I intend to build a shack there; and then spend my time fishing, shooting, reading, loafing and smoking—principally the two latter. And if I should happen to see Corporal Wilson or any of the other boys pass my rural retreat with tongue hanging out, playing hide-and-seek with some bohunk all over the lot—well, sir, my happiness would be just about complete." And the sergeant's grin broadened.

"Well, Sergeant, I can see your point to a certain

extent," said the inspector reflectively. "But even so, England is England, you know; and think of the good times one can have over there. And, anyhow, it is a change of scenery."

"That is about all it is, sir, a change of scenery, with honours in favour of the scenery left behind. As for good times—well I'm not in full agreement with you there, sir. I have from time to time revisited the home of my forbears; and every time I started out with the laudable intention of having the time of my life. But somehow things didn't pass according to schedule. I seemed to have grown out of touch with people and things over there. The good times in London seemed to develop into one perpetual pub-crawl, and the theatres were vile. Either they had put on stuff that was too deep for me, or else the exhibits were such that they caused my youthful cheeks to be covered with rosy blushes. No, sir, I generally managed to come away disappointed and somewhat bored."

"But your relatives? I understand you have quite a crowd over there. Surely you must have had some good times with some of them?"

"Don't talk about my relatives, sir. They insisted on receiving me in that gentle, pitying, forbearing spirit accorded the lost sheep or the returned prodigal. They never could forgive me for joining the Police. Particular blighters, and strong on tradition and that kind of bilge. They don't seem to fancy having a kind of 'Bobby' in the fold. No, the relatives were somewhat of a severe frost."

The inspector laughed.

"But when you, in a few years' time, attain commissioned rank I suppose their point of view will change somewhat?"

"Yes, sir. If that happy event should ever come to pass I will to them appear a bright edition of the bird Phœnix; vindicated, whitewashed; dark past redeemed. But till that time arrives, I think I'll patronize the backwoods. I may in my leisure hours dream of the glories I am missing. You know, sir, the shadow is always more attractive than the

substance, so I ought to get a lot of pleasure out of that."

"You are a queer customer, Sergeant," remarked the inspector. "But I suppose you know your own business best." And there the matter was allowed to rest.

Sergeant Richard Weston was between twenty-nine and thirty years of age. He was six feet tall and tipped the scales at a hundred and eighty pounds, but he was so symmetrically built that he did not actually look his weight and height. He was straight as a ram-rod and looked every inch a soldier. His decidedly good-looking, clean-shaven face, from which a pair of brown eyes looked serenely out in the world, generally wore an expression of quiet boredom; and this had led to some unpleasantness to other people in the past. It had happened on occasions that some of the care-free, to whom physiognomy was not even a name, had summed up Weston from his mild and serene appearance as a harmless "dude," and had, on the strength of that summation, ventured to carry their pleasantries toward him past the point which is considered seemly. And the results had been as distressing as they had been unexpected. For Weston, deservedly, had the reputation of being the best boxer and scrapper in the Police, and was generally labelled a "tough nut."

His father had been a distinguished army officer. Both he and his wife had died during an epidemic while serving in India before young Richard had reached his tenth year. But they had left their children—Richard and an elder sister—extremely well off. Young Richard had in due course been sent to Harrow; and when he left school his relatives had considered it a matter of course that he enter Sandhurst and follow in his father's footsteps. But then young Richard had dropped a bomb in their midst by declaring that he intended to go out to Canada and join the Royal North-West Mounted Police!

This bald announcement had first stunned his relatives into horrified silence; but for a moment only. And soon the storm burst! They all fell on him at

once, and exclamations, of which fragments such as: "Disgracing the family," "A common trooper," "A ranker," etc., were the outstanding features, buzzed into his ears in an endless stream. But through it all young Richard kept his head well; looked extremely bored; and declared stoutly—every time his relatives were forced to interrupt their efforts through lack of breath—that he was going, no matter what they might say. When pressed for a reason for this "most unseemly and outrageous plan," the only answer he vouchsafed was, that the life of an army officer in peace time did not appeal to him, and that he wanted to see life. Again the storm broke. "Duty to the family and its honoured traditions," "Considerations due to your upbringing and social standing," "*Noblesse oblige*" (this from an aunt who had been a lady-in-waiting sometime during the Victorian era), etc., were flung at his head; but he remained obdurate. For young Richard had a most determined will of his own.

At last the family, in council assembled, and after much wrangling, decided to let him have his way; for, it was unanimously agreed, before a year had passed he would be certain to have come to his senses; and then they would gather him into the fold—in this case Sandhurst—and in due course launch him into the world, a Christian and a gentleman.

But Richard had refused to live up to their anticipations, and a certain coldness on the part of the relatives was the unavoidable result. This coldness was not the actual deciding moment in his determination to take to the backwoods—it was principally his love for the big open spaces and the free trail which had decided him—but it had carried a certain weight in the tipping of the scales. He took an inordinate pride in his chosen profession, and had tried to transfuse some of this pride into his relatives; but his advances had been received frostily. They had not actually sneered at him; but they had amply indicated that according to their views he had placed himself quite outside the pale, and that no argument he might advance could rehabilitate him. This attitude had piqued Weston

considerably, and he decided, therefore, to give his relatives and their hunting ground a wide berth for the time being.

The sergeant was now sitting on his bed in the barrack-room of the Portage Bend Detachment. He was puffing contentedly away at his pipe as he was thoughtfully contemplating Corporal Wilson and Constables Connor and Bryan, who were busily packing the last bundles of his outfit on the floor in front of him.

"Look here," he remarked presently, "it seems to me that your efforts lack to a certain extent the necessary snap and ginger. I am sure you will not consider it a presumption on my part if I gently point out to you that my leave is limited to three months, only."

"Oh, shut up!" came from the toilers on the floor.

Corporal Wilson, however, considered that the occasion called for a few supplementary remarks.

"It is all right for you to talk, Wess! All you are doing is to keep your seat warm while we have to do the dirty work for you."

"May I be allowed to remark," observed Weston mildly, "that while I was quietly and efficiently packing my gear, you fellows would insist on butting in and getting in the way, so that at last—in sheer self-defence, mind—I was forced to retire from active participation in the operations and confine myself to general supervision."

"Gee wizz! What a sentence! It is a wonder you don't break that jaw of yours, Sergeant," exclaimed Constable Bryan, a young Canadian, lifting his face, red from exertion, from the bundle he was packing. "And where do you get that quiet and efficient stuff from, anyhow? You raised such an all-fired racket, that we simply had to take over your duties to make sure that you got started sometime. We ain't going to take any chances of you being delayed and hanging around here. Not if we can help it!"

"The discipline around this Detachment is sadly deteriorating," sighed the sergeant. "I shudder to

think of what it will be like after you fellows have been without my restraining influence for three months. I suppose it will become my painful duty to introduce physical and rifle drill every morning at five sharp. Nothing like physical jerks in the snappy, early hours for propping up the crumbling edifice of discipline. But we'll see. Have you packed all my literature, Connor? "

" Sure! "

" What is that book lying on the table over there? "

" Oh, that is mine," answered Connor, a note of holy enthusiasm creeping into his voice. " It's a regular top-notcher. ' The Headsman of Berlin ' it is called. Topping yarn! If you haven't read it, I'll lend it to you, Sergeant."

Weston groaned.

" We were discussing literature, and not . . ." he began, but was promptly interrupted by Connor.

" Say, Sergeant, what is the matter with that book as literature? " he cried aggressively. " It's darn good literature at that! It is full of psychology and physiology and all kinds of soul-stuff. You know! Kind of shows up the mental dope of both the executioner and his victim before executions. Kind of stuff that makes you think! I know you put the jinx on any book that is not written by Kipling or some of the other big-leaguers; but what is so grand about Kipling? All he does, is to fill his books with booze-fighting soldiers, and then he proceeds to describe what they feel like when they have got sore heads. No class to 'em, I mean, compared to deep stuff like ' The Headsman '; and you can tell 'em I said so! "

The sergeant grinned broadly.

" My dear Connor, I am sorely afraid that you have mistaken your vocation in life. You have not, if I may say so, found your niche. You ought to have been a literary critic. Your comprehensive grasp on matters literary is simply amazing. But it strikes me that your English has deteriorated sadly lately. When I first knew you as a rosy-cheeked boy your rendering of the English language was such that it only made

a purist shiver gently. But now it would shake even the less fastidious to the core. I am afraid that it is your daily association with our friend Bryan which has caused this relapse. I sadly fear that having to listen to the pot-pourri, which he labels English, would ruin even a careful man's vocabulary, if taken in large and frequent doses."

"Say, what is wrong with my lingo?" snapped Bryan. "It's good Canuck, if you wantoknow! I reckon you would prefer me to sling my jaw dude-fashion: 'Haw, wather topping day, don'-cha-know, old chappie, what, what?' I suppose that is the kind of stuff you'd fancy, Sergeant!"

The sergeant grinned broader than ever.

"Your imitation of the speech of a cultured Englishman is simply a masterpiece of perfect mimicry, Bryan."

But now Corporal Wilson—who had at last finished his bundle—spoke up:

"Say, Wess, you have been jawing continuously for an hour or so, and been trying to get everybody's goat. I have never heard a worse fellow for gassing and talking tripe! You are just like an alarm clock I had once, that had all the gadgets for stopping the ringing broken. It kept going till the juice gave out. You are as bad as that, and it has got to stop! Let's gag him, boys!" and with a whoop he made a dash for the sergeant, followed by the constables.

In spite of his manful struggles against heavy odds the sergeant was soon lying full length on his bed, with his fellow officers perching on various parts of his anatomy; a pillow covering his face.

"Will you behave, Wess?" inquired the corporal, as spokesman for the champions for peace and harmony.

"Poofsh, poofsh," came muffled from under the pillow.

"Ease up a bit on the soft pedal, Corporal, so we can hear what the gentleman has got to say," advised Bryan.

Wilson lifted a corner of the pillow.

"Is it war or pax, Wess?"

"Pax, boys, pax—and breakfast! I am so empty that I felt Bryan go straight through me when he sat down on my stomach just now. Let me up. Here is Angus with the rest of the bearer-party," pleaded the sergeant, as three half-breeds entered the room.

The limbs of the law sorted themselves out, and got up from the bed.

"Here you are, Angus," said the sergeant, indicating the bundles on the floor. "That is the rest of the lot."

"Lot is right," commented Connor in a *sotto voce* aside to Corporal Wilson. "I bet you Columbus would have felt slightly embarrassed if jolly old Isabella had tried to make him ship half of the sergeant's truck when he was setting out to discover New York and district."

Angus and his assistants, in the meantime, quickly fastened their "portage-straps" to the bundles, adjusted the straps on their heads, and departed towards the river and the waiting canoes.

"I will be down directly!" shouted the sergeant after them. "I am only going to hustle some grub. What's the time somebody?"

"Six-twenty," answered Bryan.

"Good! Then I'll be able to start before seven. Get into your tunics, and let's get over to the 'Chink's' for our breakfast."

The corporal and the constables had been working in their shirt-sleeves during their packing operations. The sergeant himself was dressed in mufti; an old Norfolk jacket; a pair of baggy, but comfortable trousers; moccasins on his feet; and on his head a felt hat, which looked as if it had seen the years roll by and had been saddened by the sight. The *tout ensemble* had caused Bryan to remark that: "The worst hobo would feel like a Piccadilly dude if he got one squint at the sergeant's rig."

The two constables climbed into their tunics, but the corporal hesitated.

"Say, Wess," he addressed the sergeant apologetically. "Before you leave, there is one or two things in the office I want you to explain to me."

"Good Lord," growled Weston. "Didn't I carefully go through every voucher and report with you yesterday? What on earth is biting you? I want to get off!"

"There are a few things I haven't quite got the strangle-hold on. It will only take a few minutes, Wess," pleaded Wilson. "Connor and Bryan can go on ahead and order our breakfasts."

"Right oh. Order a double helping of bacon and eggs for me, and a lot of coffee," the sergeant directed the two constables—now resplendent in Stetson hat; scarlet tunic; dark blue riding breeches with yellow stripes; and bespurred, shiny Strathcona boots. "Come on, Wils, and make it snappy. What the dickens you fellows will do around here, without me to drynurse you, the Lord only knows," he grumbled as he followed the corporal into the office.

But Corporal Wilson's few minutes seemed each to expand indefinitely past its normal scope of sixty seconds. Each minute did not exactly run into hours; but pretty nearly so—or so, at least, it appeared to the sergeant. Wilson—normally the bright lad—seemed particularly dull and lacking in perception on this morning. Documents which he—the sergeant—had explained fully and comprehensively to the corporal on the preceding day, and which he had considered safely interred in the annals of the past—as far as he was concerned—were now deftly exhumed by the corporal and presented for a post-mortem examination. The more impatient the sergeant grew the duller the corporal seemed to become in ratio. At last the sergeant exclaimed in exasperation:

"For the love of Mike, Wils! Which was the last mental institute you attended? I only ask because there must have been gross negligence on somebody's part—letting you loose, I mean."

"Don't go in off the deep end, Wess. I don't seem to be able to get the half-Nelson on these things this morning. I don't know what is the matter with me," said Wilson apologetically.

"Got a hang-over, I suppose," was Weston's somewhat direct and brutal comment.

But the sergeant was utterly wrong in his diagnosis. Corporal Wilson's head was quite clear, and the dullness he affected was only an adroit move in a little game he was playing. Certain arrangements of the corporal's might be upset if the sergeant appeared near the river before seven o'clock. So the wily Wilson had staged the whole scene with the sole object of sparring for time.

When the hands of the clock had at last crawled around to ten minutes before seven, the corporal let his now almost fuming victim off. They thereupon proceeded to the Chink restaurant—where they were wont to take their meals—quickly wrapped themselves outside a substantial breakfast; and at 7.05 the sergeant, escorted by the corporal and the two constables, laid a course for the river.

As the party arrived at the rim of the plateau, and could see the river bank at the bottom of the slope, the sergeant stopped dead.

"What on earth is up? Has there been an accident or something?" he inquired anxiously. For the bank near the waiting canoes was thronged with what, according to local estimates, must be described as a vast concourse of persons of both sexes. As the sergeant watched the crowd there was a sudden flash of brightly burnished metal, and the Portage Bend Voluntary Band struck up: "See the Conquering Hero Comes."

The sergeant was an adept at adding two and two together, and with unerring instinct he placed the responsibility for the demonstration in the right quarter.

"I owe you one for this, Wils. I now perceive that there was method in your madness this morning. I suppose the balloon was scheduled to go up at seven a.m.," he said, eyeing Wilson vindictively. "And I suppose you two are in it too," he continued to the two constables, who were frankly grinning. "Don't waste any breath on futile denials, gentlemen. The jury has found you guilty without leaving the box." He again turned his attention to the assembly on the bank.

"You seem to have made a pretty thorough sweep of the town. Nobody seems to be missing. By hec! There is the inspector, too; and his missus. So even he has been persuaded to stray from the narrow path. Well, I'll get even with the lot of you yet. I have got three whole months in which to scheme out a fitting punishment for your misguided efforts. And let me inform you right here and now, that Machiavelli will have to take a back seat in history by the time I am through with you! Anyhow, let us advance —or rather descend. Nobody shall ever be able to say that a Weston faltered in the face of heavy odds."

By the time the sergeant and escort had scrambled down the slope, the band had blown itself out. "Big" MacKay, a lumber-man friend of the sergeant, dressed in his best suit and resplendent with collar and tie, detached himself from the crowd and came solemnly forward, a roll of paper in his hand. He stopped some paces in front of the apprehensive sergeant, unrolled the paper, and commenced reading an address in a loud voice.

The address we will not give in full. It is sufficient to say that its subject matter was principally a comparison between Weston and other explorers who had carried the torch of civilization into dark and dim corners of the earth in the past; such as Cook, Columbus, Stanley and the American tourist doing Yurrup. The address paid handsome tributes to the sergeant, and drew very favourable comparisons between him and the other gentlemen; but, nevertheless, the sergeant was not happy! As a matter of fact, he had made one determined effort to quash the proceedings right at the start; but had been badly routed. MacKay had neatly voiced the sentiments of those present when he gently but firmly pointed out to the sergeant that "you are going to take in the whole of these here ce-le-brations as per pro-gramme, Wess, if we have to hawg-tie you; so you may as well take it peaceful like." And Weston took it peacefully —at least, outwardly. Inwardly, however . . . but we will not expose the horrors of a strong man's soul, writhing in acute agony.

The address at last having been brought to a happy conclusion, there followed speeches and more music, delivered with a maximum of good-will and sound, and a minimum of harmony.

It was past eight o'clock before the sergeant was allowed to take his departure. Followed by the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" and the cheers of those left behind—including some twenty children and eight dogs, who lined the rim of the plateau above—the canoes of the adventurers glided out on the great Saskatchewan. That a horse-shoe—which was thrown after them for good luck—missed the sergeant's head by a fraction of an inch and fell into the river, was considered somewhat of a bad omen; but apart from that the expedition started under the happiest auspices.

The sergeant's flotilla consisted of two twenty-four-foot and one eighteen-foot Peterborough canoes, and for crew he had four half-breeds. Weston and one Angus worked one twenty-four-footer and two half-breeds the other. The eighteen-footer was handled by one breed only, as it carried a considerably lighter load than the other canoes. As a matter of fact, the bulk of its cargo consisted of a small cooking range, dismantled and crated—which the sergeant had hopes of being able to reassemble; a case marked "With Care. Glass," and which contained window-panes for the projected cabin; and one other case also marked "With Care. Glass," which, however, did not contain window-panes.

Of three members of the sergeant's crew nothing needs be said, as they were merely birds of passage. The arrangement was, that the three return to Portage Bend as soon as they had assisted Weston and Angus in completing their camp. But Angus must be properly introduced.

His full name was Angus MacKenzie; but in spite of the vision conjured up by that name of a tall, straight, red-headed hie-lander, one has to confess that Angus was small, inclined to be bow-legged, and looked about ninety-nine and a half per cent. Indian with his black hair and swarthy features. Nor could

he perform on the bagpipes. But in spite of all, Angus was very proud of his Scotch parentage, and consistently refused being taken for an Indian. Once—on one of the rare occasions when he had been slightly under the influence of fire-water—he had withered an earnest inquirer, who had wanted to know if Angus was not an Indian, by the following statement:

"No, sir. Me no dam' Injun. Me full-blooded Scotch half-breed!" The statement is somewhat involved, but one sees his point.

But though small of stature, Angus was decidedly tough and wiry; and in addition he was blessed with a keen intelligence.

The first meeting between Weston and Angus had been somewhat dramatic. Shortly after his first arrival in the Bend, the former had discovered Angus lying on the ground in the process of being kicked to death by a number eleven lumber-man's hobnailed boot, which encased the foot of a big, ugly, furious, half-drunk Russian, who had taken umbrage to Angus for some reason or other. As Weston objected strongly to that particular form of summary punishment, he had immediately gone into action, and in a swift round—lasting about one second—he had knocked the Russian out for the count. Since then Angus had attached himself to Weston, and he had rendered the policeman valuable assistance in many past adventures. On the other hand, Weston had learnt to appreciate Angus's many good qualities; his honesty; his unswerving loyalty; his fearlessness; his quick wit; and by now, the intercourse between the two had developed into a kind of Mutual Admiration Society; and Weston invariably brought Angus along as guide, philosopher, and friend when he took to the trail.

For two days Weston's expedition pushed up-stream on the Saskatchewan. On the third day they turned up one of the water sheds leading about due north, and for six more days they pushed farther and farther into the deep woods. They paddled up rivers and across lakes; they paddled, poled, and lined up the smaller rapids; and they struggled with their canoes

and equipment along the often formidable and tortuous portages around the bigger rapids.

The sergeant could not have picked on a better stamping-ground than Clear Water Lake and surrounding country. The lake itself was about twenty miles long; studded with tree-covered islands; surrounded by spruce-covered hills and ridges. Into the hills from the lake shot numerous bays—some long and narrow, some wide and short—and in these bays played and sported the trout, the white-fish, the bass, and other members of the piscatory tribe. In the calm of the early morning and evening ring beside ring formed on the glassy surface of these bays from rising fish, till the water was rippled and agitated with small wavelets.

In amongst the trees in the woods whizzed the partridges on their way to the clearings, where they tripped around on the ground in big flocks, nibbling the berries off the juniper and wild berry bushes, which grew here in wild abundance.

Only ten miles away were the "Grassy Hills" on whose slopes roamed big herds of jumping-deer; so on Clear Water Lake there was to be found occupation for rod, gun and rifle.

From the southern end of the lake flowed the Gulch River. For some distance the river winds fairly slowly and serenely in and out amongst low hills; but gradually it narrows and gains speed, until at last the waters are hurled—a boiling, foaming mass—into the Gulch Rapids some two miles from the lake end. These rapids—roaring and raging through a gap between two almost perpendicular cliff walls, each some fifty to sixty feet high—can in more or less safety be "shot" by an expert canoe-man, but they are a regular death-trap for the novice or the less experienced.

The portage around these rapids is universally unpopular. Although the whole portage is only about two miles long, it leads across a pretty steep hill; is rocky and lumpy; and the sergeant and party were perspiring and swearing freely as they struggled across with their packs.

"Say, Angus," said Weston to his right-hand man,

as the two were resting on the portage. "That river over there is the one leading up to Grassy Hills, isn't it?" and he pointed across to the opposite bank, where another river emptied itself into the here swiftly-flowing Gulch River.

"Aha," affirmed Angus. He was a man of few words, and seldom given to small talk.

"Well, as soon as we are firmly settled, one of our first trips will be to Grassy Hills. It happens that I have never been up that way before, and I want to see if there really are as many deer up there as people tell you."

"Plenty deer," grunted Angus, as he and the sergeant struggled to their feet with their packs.

The island on which the sergeant had decided to build his camp was almost in the centre of the lake. It was approximately one mile long and half a mile in width. The south end of the island was low and grassy, with birch-trees and aspen forming a natural park. Towards the northern end this park sloped gently to where the island ended in a spruce-covered hill. On the eastern shore of the low part was a small, sandy cove—shaped like a lagoon—which formed a natural, sheltered harbour for the canoes.

For more than a week this island was the centre of intense activities. The air rang with the clanking of axes and whining of saws. Hefty spruces were cut down and hauled to Weston's camp-site beside the lagoon. The sergeant, as the moving spirit, spurred the usually phlegmatic and indolent breeds on to unwonted manifestations of energy, and soon the camp commenced to take shape. On the tenth day it stood completed in all its new glory, the pride of Weston's heart.

They had built two shacks. The bigger—their living quarters—could only boast one room; but it was a fairly large, comfortable and bright room, with four windows to let in the daylight. They had constructed two bunks, somewhat crude but comfortable, with willow branches laid crosswise serving as springs. They had made a table and chairs, and a number of shelves.

On the gable end facing the entrance had been constructed a roomy hearth, for on rainy days the air could be cold and sharp. This hearth had been designed by the sergeant, and had been erected under his constant supervision; and when it was finished he declared, with not a little complacency and satisfaction, that it was "a whale of a peach." That this zoologi-botanical masterpiece had an erratic and playful habit of emitting unexpected puffs of smoke into the cabin, on the occasions when the fire was going, did not materially detract from its comfort and general cheeriness on cold, wet, and murky days and evenings.

The smaller cabin was the stores and cook-shack. In this had been installed the cooking-range, which the sergeant had managed—somewhat to his surprise—to reassemble.

Weston surveyed his domain with honest pride, and he declared to Angus that things could not possibly have been better, a sentiment to which Angus gave his wholehearted agreement by a grunt.

The extra half-breeds were now paid off and packed off to Portage Bend in one of the twenty-four-foot canoes; and Weston and Angus settled down to enjoy life. For the first four days they paddled around on the lake and took strolls into the adjacent woods. They found plenty of fish, but it was still a little early for the partridges. They shot a few, however, and with fresh fish and fowls to swell their larder they bade a fond adieu to their supply of tinned provisions for the time being.

On the evening of the fourth day the two were sitting outside the cabin, leaning against the wall, while digesting their supper. They were placidly sucking away at their pipes, and each had beside him an enamelled mug containing whisky and water. The sergeant had no scruples about supplying Angus with whisky in reasonable quantities; for in his intercourse with that fluid, and its first cousins, Angus certainly proved a true descendant from the Scotch side of the house. It has been hinted at an earlier stage of this narrative that it had happened on occasions that booze had got the upper hand of Angus, but that had

happened very infrequently. The happy occasions were far and few between, when the flow of booze was liberal enough to bring about such a result.

The sergeant gazed approvingly at the lake and the woods, over which the sun, hanging low over the north-western horizon, shed its slanting rays.

"Isn't it wonderful, Angus?" he said presently. "The peace and quiet of it all! So soothing and restful to be away from the turmoil of the bustling, striving world. I can fully appreciate the spirit which used to drive the old jokers of yore into the great alone when they got fed up with the world and made them establish themselves as hermits. A scene like this is enough to make anybody wish to renounce the world and all the rest of it—anyhow, occasionally," he qualified his last statement. He paused for a moment to take a sip from his mug. Angus was stoutly sucking away at his pipe in silence. He was used to these little homilies from the sergeant. He never made any comments, principally because he knew that no comments were expected, secondly because he generally did not understand what the sergeant was talking about. To him it was mostly mere bosh, which did not interest him in the slightest. But the sergeant very often took these fits in the evening; and they did not particularly incommode Angus. By now he had trained himself not to listen. The thing had to Angus grown into a kind of boring ritual which had to be endured.

"Look at those deep shadows under those trees on the west shore," fared the sergeant forth in his panegyric. "Kind of forbidding, mysterious; looking as if elves and goblins might be sporting in there. It is rotten to reflect that in a few years' time the sublime peace of this place might be broken by the loud, coarse voices and the boisterous laugh of fishermen and lumber-jacks. For they are creeping farther and farther up this way. Advance of civilization some will call it, I suppose. Gosh, civilization! What blinkety tosh! It seems to me that the whole object of that process which is commonly known as civilizing is to tear down beauty and substitute ugliness and

sordidness. Look at the cities, where the poor mortals crawl around like worms in a muck-heap; a stinking, sweating mass! Say, Angus, why on earth do people live in the stinking, cramped atmosphere of a city?"

"Plenty of movie-shows in city," unexpectedly answered Angus.

"Eh? What's that?" stammered the sergeant, thrown completely out of his stride by this astounding breach of precedent and established tradition. He looked severely at Angus for a few seconds, but as that worthy did not seem to be conscious of any breach of etiquette, Weston took up his remark. "Oh, well. I get you! I forgot that you were an incurable movie-fan. I suppose you are of the opinion that the cities justify their existence through supplying you with the joy of your heart. There is something in that, of course. However . . . Oh, hang it, Angus! I have forgotten what I was going to say! And I was just on the point of waxing poetical. And you have torn it, my lad, by your inopportune interruption. Never will the world now be gladdened by my words of wisdom and beauty. However, since you have managed to lower the intercourse from the spiritual to the material, we may as well accept the situation and continue in that vein. What say you to a trip to Grassy Hills to-morrow?"

"Sure! Damn fine!"

"Carried *nem. con.* As soon as we have finished our smoke we'll start on our preparations for the trip."

The programme was duly carried out, and early on the following morning they set out. They used the bigger of the two canoes they had got left, for the trip. They brought with them supplies for four days; besides tent, rifles and shotguns.

The swift current in the Gulch River just above the rapids makes the mouth of Grassy Hill River rather difficult to approach; and the hard paddle-work involved caused the sergeant to voice a few loud and adverse comments on the wisdom of Providence in having arranged the relative positions of the two rivers as It had. These comments failed, however, to evoke

any sympathy in Angus. He knew that Weston's comments were pure, unadulterated bluff, and only put forth as a kind of concession to popular sentiment. For there was nothing that the sergeant liked better than to negotiate a tricky bit of river; and shooting rapids was his dearest hobby.

Four days later the hunters again approached the junction of the two rivers on their return trip. The expedition had been eminently successful, as the carcass of a deer and several partridges were added to the cargo of the canoe.

At the moment when their hands instinctively took a firmer grip around their paddles in anticipation of the impending struggle with the turbulent waters of Gulch River, their eyes beheld a most startling vision. From behind a bend farther up Gulch River shot a canoe, heading straight for the rapids; and in the canoe sat a girl dressed in white, with a jaunty, white panama hat on her head!

## CHAPTER II

New York was enjoying one of those bright days in the early summer when it was neither too hot nor too cold. Even the most pessimistic-minded had to admit that the temperature was just right!

Even the policeman who was strolling along the shady side of Lower Broadway—casting proprietary glances along the street from under his cap-peak—seemed to have fallen under the spell of the weather. He was twirling his baton light-heartedly—or an austere critic might even have gone as far as to use the term frivolously—between his fingers, as he was wondering how long it would be before the sergeant would pass him by on his rounds, and leave him free to nip around the corner to a saloon he wot of, for a much needed refresher.

Through the people who thronged the side-walk on the shady side of the street, a gentleman pushed his way with a determined air, his jaws champing rhythmically on his chewing-gum. He was of medium size, dressed in a check suit, with a cloth cap drawn well down over his eyes. There was nothing particularly obtrusive about his appearance, and a casual observer would have passed him by without a second glance. There was, however, a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* about the cast of his clean-shaven features with the quick, furtive eyes, which would have made a keen and experienced student of the New York specimens of the *genus homo* pause and consider. And if the above student had been a master of his subject he would unerringly have classified the passer-by as a member of society who would consider an automatic pistol in a holster under his armpit, and a stuffed eelskin in his pocket, indispensable and integral parts of a gentleman's wardrobe.

And the student would have guessed correctly. For Slippery Jim was a crook, and a hard-working crook at that. For years he had hardly had any holidays, except on the few occasions when he, reluctantly, had been obliged to accept the hospitality dispensed by the public at Sing-Sing and similar places of entertainment.

As Slippery pushed his way along the side-walk he suddenly bumped into a man who had just come out of a cigar store.

"Say, why don't you keep them lamps of yours skinned so that you . . ." he commenced aggressively, but that was as far as he got. For, getting a clear view of the other man's face, his own lit up in pleased recognition. "Gosh, if it ain't Joe!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Put it there, Joe! I guess I ain't glad to have you within range of my optics! Just ask me! I ain't saw you since God knows when. Where you been, Joe?"

The other man—taller and heavier than Slippery, but bearing the same hall-mark in spite of not inconsiderable structural and facial dissimilarities—seemed equally pleased to meet Slippery. But at the latter's

query about his past whereabout a cloud flitted over his sunny features.

"Had a piece of tough luck. Been up the river for some months," he explained lugubriously, jerking his head in the direction in which he presumed Sing-Sing to be situated. "Met a festive-looking gent—who looked as if he might sport a sizeable wad—down a dark street one night and busted him one over the head. And like a mug, I hadn't noticed that an interfering cop was rubbering from around a corner. I must of had water on the brains or something to have made a break like that. Cost me six months," he ended gloomily.

"Tough luck!" commented Slippery with a sympathetic click of his tongue. "Ain't them cops getting interfering now!"

"What you been doing lately, Slippery?" inquired Joe, obviously desirous of changing the subject.

"Nothing much. What with the cops getting snoopier an' snoopier every day, and one thing an' another; there ain't hardly no chance for a go-getter with initiative to get nowheres these days," said Slippery with simple pathos. "It ain't as if anybody could say I wasn't a hard-working guy. You know yourself, Joe, that I ain't no sluggard when there is anything doin'; and that I don't pass up nothing that offers. But what can you expect when you don't hardly get a chance? Gosh, it's fierce!" he ended bitterly.

"You said it! Times ain't what they used to be. It's getting so that a fellar can't hardly call his soul his own. And they call this a free country!" observed Joe bitterly, his voice husky with emotion.

And the two friends shook their heads sorrowfully, as their souls visualized the awful tragedy of the utter degeneration of a great and mighty nation!

Having passed this, their last silent tribute to the freedom and liberty of the U.S.A. (deceased), they once more turned their attention to mundane matters.

"Say! I've got a date with a guy," explained Joe briskly, once more the man of affairs. "I must get a move on. Which way are you goin', Slippery?"

"I was hoofing it for the Gorgonzola Building when I met you. I have to go down an' see old Schinkelstein. He wrote an' told me he had some biss for me!"

"Say! Doesn't that beat the band? Just ask me! Let me tell you somethin', Slippery! Old Schinky is the guy I've got a date with. Say!" Joe exclaimed, slightly excited, "I wonder if Schinky has a job doped out for you an' me to work together on! Wouldn't that be just fine? Say, do you remember them days when you an' me worked them shacks up in the Adirondacks? Some swell job that! Easy pickings that was. We cleared quite a wad on that trip."

"It sure would be fine to work together; but I hope that Schinky ain't springin' a job out amongst the hay-seeds on us," said Slippery. "I don't know that I have any great hankering after leavin' li'l ol' New York just now. There is the base-ball season well away, with the Giants leading, and it would be fierce missing the ball-games for sittin' out amongst the rubes, where there ain't no movies an' no decent saloons. Taking another think, though," he added reflectively, "I ain't so sure that it wouldn't be wise for me to retire incog. for some time, an' give the cops a chance of getting into the habit of forgetting me. They have been some curious about me lately. Anyhow, let's breeze along and hear what line of dope Schinky is going to hand out."

Mr. Schinkelstein was a gentleman in the early fifties of pronounced semitic extraction. His original nationality was too involved to enable anyone to settle it with anything approaching accuracy; but for a considerable number of years the U.S.A. had been accorded the privilege of claiming him as a citizen. The brass plate on the entrance to his office proclaimed him a "Broker"; but one can form some idea as to the extent of his brokerage business when one is informed that Mr. Schinkelstein's suite of offices was limited to one room only, and that the sum total of his staff was one man—Mr. Schinkelstein himself! But the modest surroundings must not lead one to the erroneous impression that the concern was of no

importance. As a matter of fact, Mr. Schinkelstein's business was extremely flourishing, and he had a large and varied clientele.

During a man's weary pilgrimage through life it happens on occasions that he finds himself up against an obstacle which is barring his way. Some men, when they arrive before such a barrier, simply sit down and quit; others strive to remove the obstruction by bringing hard toil and brains to bear; and then there is a third class, who simply remove, or cause to be removed, the obstacle by resorting to one of those acts which are frowned upon by the champions of law and order. And to those Mr. Schinkelstein's office is a veritable Mecca. All one has to do is to enter the Mecca; state the service or services required; fork out the cash requested; and then leave the rest to Mr. Schinkelstein. And Mr. Schinkelstein can be trusted to handle any job assigned to him with the utmost discretion and tact. If anything should happen to go wrong one can rest assured that Mr. Schinkelstein or his client will not be the ones to suffer the consequences of failure.

When Messrs. Joe and Slippery entered his office, Mr. Schinkelstein beamed on them through his glasses with obvious pleasure.

"Vell, vell! How are you, boys? I heard you have chust been resting, Joe. Tough luck! Sit down, sit down and have a cigar. I've got a chob for you two boys." Mr. Schinkelstein had a fair control of the English language; but he would persist in treating several of the consonants in an unorthodox manner.

"Howdy, Schinky!" greeted Joe and Slippery.

"Now give us the spiel, Schinky," suggested Joe when they were seated, each puffing away at a two-for-a-quarter cigar.

"Yes, yes, boys. Ve vill have a nice little chat. Chust lock the door, one of you. Vat I have to say is strictly private."

"It would be, or else there wouldn't be no job for us," muttered Slippery, getting up. He walked across to the door, turned the key in the lock, and returned to his seat.

"Vell, now ve can talk," commenced Mr. Schinkelstein. "Have you boys heard of Hiram J. Morgan, the millionaire fruit importer?"

Joe merely nodded; but Slippery poured forth a few rather excited remarks:

"Do I know of Hiram J. Morgan? Wake me up in the night an' ask me another! I nearly got hooked once doing a little job around his joint on Riverside Drive. Say! Lemme tell you something, Schinky! If you want a job done around his homestead, then rule out this baby. That ain't a Christian house at all; but a son of a b—— of a trap, with burglar-alarms and things all over the place!"

"Don't excite yourself, friend Chim. I don't vant you to burgle his house. I chust vant you to kidnap his daughter," explained Schinkelstein simply.

There was silence for a few minutes in the office. Not because the occupants had been particularly startled by this bald announcement. But simply because Schinkelstein had found it expedient to perform some small dental operations with the aid of a gold tooth-pick, which he had extricated from his vest-pocket; and Joe waited patiently for him to continue. The only one who felt any qualms at the kidnapping-prospect was Slippery. Not because the mere matter of kidnapping was particularly abhorrent to him. The reason for his scruples stuck deeper than that. Once, in a not distant past, he had committed the tactical blunder of letting a girl coax him to take her to Coney Island; only to find out the painful truth afterwards that her "steady" was a prize-fighter of no mean repute in the Bowery. Since then Slippery had yielded to a strong leaning towards misogyny, and had endeavoured to evade any jobs which involved women. He took advantage of the temporary silence in the office to voice his scruples.

"Say, Schinky, I can't say I feel like blowin' a clash of triumph on the trumpets over this job of yours. I didn't see the job yet that didn't get busted up as soon as a bit of a skirt got mixed up in it!" He spoke with considerable bitterness. The line of action adopted by the prize-fighter to convince

Slippery that he had been trespassing was still a green memory which rankled in Slippery's mind. "So I think you had better rule me out of this job."

"Vait a minute, Slippery, till I have given you the whole dope," spoke up Schinkelstein, a shade of impatience in his voice. "There von't be any bust-up on this chob! Have you ever seen me hand you out bum dope?" Like all good generals Schinkelstein used to pass lightly over past reverses. As his audience kept a discreet silence he continued: "Vell, here is the proposition. Hiram J. is going up to Canada in a fortnight's time vith his vife an' daughter on a fishing-trip. They are going by rail to a place called Portage Bend; and from there they are going by canoes into the woods to a likely place to camp. Now you boys vill go up to Portage Bend ahead of them; and when you get there you vill find out where they are going to camp. Then you vill camp in some hidden place in the district where Hiram J. is camping, and when you get an opportunity you'll pinch his daughter."

"An' what then?" grunted Joe.

"Vait, vait!" admonished Schinkelstein, impatiently waving a much diamond-beringed hand in the air. "I ain't finished yet. When you have got the girl, you vill send him a letter which I'll give you; and in the letter is explained vat he is to do, do you see, to recover his daughter. He must also sign some documents, which are also in the letter; and then he must send the documents to a place I have arranged for, do you see. As soon as I get the documents, I'll send you word; and you can let the girl go back to her pa, do you see."

"And what are them papers?" asked Joe.

"Is it necessary for you to know?"

"You are damn tooting it is! You don't think we'll go into this job blindfolded, do you? Well, then you've got another guess coming. I for one ain't going to find myself in the soup up to my neck without knowing how I got there, if anything goes wrong. So you had better spiel it all out, so we know what we are at!"

"All right, all right. Nothing to get mad about, Joe. I'll put you wise to the whole scheme. It's like this. Hiram J. is forming a big syndicate to collar the whole of the fruit import. Now there is already a smaller syndicate, do you see, the Gulf Fruit Import Company; and this bigger syndicate will smash the smaller one when it starts operating, do you see. Now, his daughter is the apple of his eye, and if ve get hold of her, he'll do anything to get her back. So you see, ve pinch the daughter; father signs the documents ve send him; he gets back daughter; ve get the documents which mean the dissolution of the new syndicate if they are used the right way; the new syndicate gets dissolved; the Gulf Fruit Import Company is safe; and all is happy! Now, boys, I ask you. Ain't that an attractive proposition? No risks or nothing, a very fine holiday up in the woods, and no cops to interfere."

"I ain't so sure about that," said Joe doubtfully. "Ain't they got some kind of cops up there what floats all around the country?"

"Ah, you mean the Mounted Police. I have heard about it. But they won't be no trouble to you boys. You boys'll know how to handle the kind of country rubes they have got for police up there. Anyhow, you'll be far too far away from people where you'll be, for any cops to come bothering you. Now vat about it?"

"Well, it sounds the goods," hesitatingly said Joe, who seemed to have constituted himself spokesman for himself and co. "But personally I ain't shouting for joy at the prospect of hangin' around in the backwoods, miles and miles away from saloons an' movies. We may hand you the helping mitt, though, if there is enough dough in it for us."

A certain tenseness manifested itself in the three faces. They had now arrived at the important part of the deal.

"Vell, there is five hundred dollars for each of you boys in this deal, an' all your expenses. All your expenses, mind, an' five hundred each," said Schinkelstein impressively.

Joe gave a short, contemptuous laugh, which was faithfully echoed by Slippery.

"What do you think you are handing us? Pocket-money for cigars?" inquired Joe sarcastically. "Five hundred dollars for sitting out in the woods for months, and dry-nursing a skirt at that! Not if I am conscious! Come again, Schinky. Say a thousand each, and our expenses; and we'll talk biss."

"But, my dear boys!" cried Schinkelstein, tears in his voice. "Vatfor can you be reasonable not?" He always tangled his English somewhat when he got excited. "Verfrom do I get anything out of the deal, ven you vant the whole lot? My dear boys! Be reasonable, yes? Five hundred dollars is a lot of money for a chob that is a cinch like this, and expenses!"

"Oh, dry up, Schinky!" was Joe's unfeeling comment. "I reckon you've got more 'an five thousand cart-wheels to handle this deal. A thousand each and expenses is what we want, or we won't sit in. That's flat! Ain't that so, Slippery?"

"You said it!" agreed Slippery.

Schinkelstein continued to plead with the two for a while. He wrung his hands, his voice was husky and quavered with emotion, and tears stood in his eyes; but even these visible signs of his distress failed to soften the two hardened individuals who were sitting opposite him. They remained adamant; and in the end Schinkelstein had to give in.

"Vell, boys, I'll give you the thousand; but it is ruin for me, that is," he said at last in a voice which was still unsteady. "You will come to me to-morrow, and I'll give you money for your expenses and all instructions. I shall also pay you each five hundred down, and pay you the rest when you are through with the chob. That all right? You know you can trust me!"

"No we don't! But I hope you have got enough grey matters so as not to double-cross us," remarked Joe grimly.

Schinkelstein tactfully passed over the implied slur on his integrity.

"Vell, boys. That's all settled, then. But there is one more thing. Miss Morgan must be treated all the time as a lady. No rough stuff, you understand!"

"Say! If you have got any dealings with a Jane, it's not her but you who is liable to get the rough end of the stick," spoke up Slippery oracularly. "What kind of a looker is this dame, anyhow?"

"I understand she is some peach. She has often been described as one of the fairest of the belles of New York," answered Schinkelstein.

"I knew it!" sighed Slippery, shaking his head; and the gloom which spread over his features showed that his worst suspicions had been confirmed. "The prettier they are the more trouble they are. Gosh, I don't like this business, and you can tell 'em I said so! But, of course, a thousand smackers is a thousand smackers!" he ended thoughtfully.

"Aw, Slippery! What's eating you?" inquired Joe. "I've seen you handle some tough propositions in my time; and now you go along and get the willies over a bit of a skirt!"

"I have my reasons!" answered Slippery darkly.

"Vell, boys," spoke up Schinkelstein, who was once more his genial self, "I won't keep you any longer. Come back to-morrow at ten in the morning, and we'll fix things up. That's all right, now? Yes?"

Joe and Slippery nodded their agreement and rose to depart. Schinkelstein saw his visitors to the door, and shook hands with each in turn. When the door had closed behind the two departing gentlemen he returned to his desk, rubbing his hands, while his face irradiated joy and pleasure.

For Schinkelstein had been paid ten thousand dollars to engineer the deal!

## CHAPTER III

Messrs. Slippery and Joe duly arrived in Portage Bend. There were two hotels at the place: the Palace and the Sprucelog. The latter being the less pretentious and select of the two, it was adopted as their temporary abode by the two gentlemen. There they would only be members of a crowd and less likely to catch the public eye. Almost immediately after their arrival they received a rude shock. On asking to be directed to the nearest saloon, so that they might lay the dust of travel, they had been informed, to their utter disgust and horror, that no such accommodation existed in the town; and their disgust rose to dismay when they were further informed that the place was "dry"!

"I could a-told you," groaned Slippery. "This baby knew all along that this skirt-business wasn't going to be no joy-parade with bands playin' an' bells ringin'!"

"You can can all that sob-stuff right here and now!" rejoined Joe angrily. His partner's constant pessimism had commenced to jar his nerves. "Listen here! It stands to reason that there must be some stuff around somewheres. No man could hang around a bum burg like this an' survive if there wasn't some of the best handy somewhere. I am going out to scout around for a bit. If I can't locate some real stuff, you can tell the world that I'm dead from the neck up!"

And Joe quickly proved that his estimation of local conditions had not merely been an optimistic dream inspired by strong desire. In under an hour he was back at their hotel. He collected Slippery and led the way to their room, carefully locked the door, and triumphantly produced a bottle of whisky.

"Say, you are some marvel, you are, Joe!"

exclaimed Slippery, his face beaming. "Where'd you get the stuff?"

"Where'd I get it?" repeated Joe loftily. "Say, lemme tell you, Slippery, that this burg is as full of boot-leggers as a mission-meeting is of white neck-ties —and then some! Of course it costs like hell, but that is Schinky's funeral. He'll have to stand the racket!"

"This is sure fine," remarked Slippery, after the dust-laying process had been progressing for some time. "All the same," he continued reflectively, "it ain't quite the same sitting behind a locked door with your booze, feeling like a sneak. I like to take my drinks free and easy with one foot on the brass rail and an elbow on the mahogany, and joshing the boys. Gosh, for li'l ol' New York!" he ended with a half sigh.

"Aw, change your record, Slippery," pleaded Joe. "It ain't as if we was up here for the rest of our natural. As soon as Hiram J. and party arrive we'll have some quick action; and as soon as the job's done we'll streak for home like greased lightning!"

"You said it! And it can't be too soon for yours truly," observed Slippery. "Damn all skirts!" he added under his breath as he emptied his glass.

The days following were not spent in idleness by the gallant couple. They immediately set about to find two guides who must have certain qualifications. Firstly they must know the country well, and secondly they must not suffer from the defect that scruples form part of their moral make-up. Their chosen profession had of necessity made both Joe and Slippery keen physiognomists, and before many days they had singled out two half-breeds who seemed to answer to the specifications. Their own experience and intuition convinced them that the two filled the second condition, and careful inquiries soon convinced them that they had all the qualifications stipulated for in the first condition. The two half-breeds were consequently approached, and a bargain was soon struck.

Joe and Slippery, of course, did not reveal to their chosen retainers the true object of the expedition.

They merely hinted that some "deep stuff" was on the cards, and that it was necessary to keep strictly "mum." The breeds nodded knowingly. They had both been employed by claim-jumpers in their days, and, not unnaturally, they jumped to the conclusion that the projected expedition was for some kindred purpose.

Joe and Slippery left nearly all the preparations for their trip to their new allies; but the special accommodations and provisions needed for entertaining a lady at their camp they secured themselves. This delicate affair they could not possibly leave to the breeds, as it needed great circumspection and tact. Several days before Hiram J. and party were due to arrive all their preparations had been completed; and the two principals had even discarded the dress of civilization to don the free and easy garments of the Great Out-doors.

They were both at the railway depot when Hiram J. Morgan, heading a procession consisting of wife, daughter, and ladies' maid, stepped off the train. Slippery eagerly scrutinized Miss Morgan; and his heart sank. Up to that moment he had vaguely hoped that Schinkelstein's description of the lady had been an exaggeration; but he now found his last hope rudely shattered.

"Gosh! She sure is some peacherino all right enough!" he mumbled unhappily. "I can see this trip is goin' to be tough!"

Miss Morgan was undoubtedly beautiful, and she had the kind of figure which inspires a ladies' tailor to his loftiest efforts, and makes him hum gaily to himself while plying his trade. A few years of close contact with Society on both sides of the Atlantic had given her a self-confident, well-balanced poise, which sat well on her.

Corporal Wilson, who was standing on the platform near the agent's office, swore later that he distinctly felt his heart miss a beat when he found her quiet, grey eyes, with the long lashes, fixed on him for a few moments, while she was curiously regarding his uniform.

Hiram J., a slightly pompous, medium-sized, clean-shaven gentleman, with greying hair and a pair of keen eyes, at once button-holed the agent; and wanted to know:

1. If there were any taxis. 2. If there were any cabs. 3. If there were conveyances of any kind. And 4. If there was anybody at the depot from the hotel to receive them. As all his queries, with the exception of number four, were negatived, the party set off on foot towards the Palace; and the handy man from the hotel, who had formed a reception committee of one, was left to collect their luggage. And, as the handy man expressed it, it took some collecting!

When the last bundle had been added to the ever-growing pile, consternation was written all over his usually placid countenance; and even the train agent eyed the young mountain of luggage with some concern.

"Some outfit!" he remarked to Corporal Wilson. "I heard from Jack up at the hotel, that they were expecting some folks from the States for a fishing and shooting trip; but this looks more as if they were going out homesteading. Do you know anything about them, Corporal?"

"Nary a thing, except that the young lady was easy to look upon. Judging from their goods and chattels, though, I should say they are intending to go exploring up to the North Pole and back again."

In the meantime the owners of the luggage had reached the Palace. Hiram J. strode up to the desk and accosted the clerk, who, incidentally, also held the positions of assistant manager, book-keeper, and hall-porter.

"I am Mr. Morgan from New York. I think you have some rooms reserved for me and party."

"Sure. One double an' two singles. The best we've got. Sign, please," answered the clerk laconically, pushing the hotel register towards Hiram J.

"I also stipulated for a private sitting-room in my letter to you," remarked the latter somewhat sternly.

"You sure did," agreed the clerk, turning the gum over in his mouth by a dexterous twist of his tongue.

"But this being the Palace and not the Waldorf-Astoria, private sitting-rooms are an unknown quantity around this hotel, so there is nothin' doin'." Quite missing the limping logic of his argument the clerk turned away to speak to a drummer who had just arrived.

Hiram J. eyed him fixedly and severely for several moments. There seemed to him to have been lacking in the past conversation that right touch of obsequiousness, due to Hiram J. Morgan, millionaire fruit importer; and he resented it! His daughter, who rightly judged from the expression on his face that a storm was impending, quickly stepped up to him and touched his arm.

"Don't pay any attention to that rude person, father," she said in an under-tone. "You must remember, we are out in the wilds now; and we can't expect to meet with any culture and refinement amongst these people."

Hiram J. turned around, a smile dispelling the clouds on his face.

"You are right, daughter!" he said, patting her hand. "I keep forgetting." He was used to following his daughter's lead in matters outside of business.

The party accepted their rooms without enthusiasm, but without adverse comments, as they had all decided to enter into the spirit of "roughing it." As a matter of fact, the rooms were clean and fairly comfortable; though not erring on the side of luxury. They further found that the meals provided by the hotel were good and wholesome, though simple.

Before the afternoon was over Hiram J., who was a shrewd observer and far from a fool, had realized that what he had at first considered to be studied insolence and impertinence on the part of those natives with whom he had come in contact, was merely the attitude of the free-born who called no man master. He realized that to the people of the North it did not matter one tittle what was a man's social position or the size of his bank-balance. What counted with them was what a man proved himself to be. And he decided to govern his further actions

accordingly. He even unbent so far as to offer Jack, the hotel clerk, a cigar; and he further had a lengthy chat with him about people and conditions in the North. He actually succeeded in avoiding taking umbrage to that gentleman's free and easy address; though the strain was heavy at first.

At nine o'clock the following morning Hiram J. proceeded to the Police Barracks, to interview the officer in charge.

Mr. Morgan had first conceived the idea for the trip through listening to the enthusiastic descriptions of the country by a friend of his, who had spent the preceding summer north of Portage Bend. This friend, a Mr. Robb, had described the deep, silent forests, the glittering lakes and rivers, and the fishing and the hunting. And what he had heard had aroused in Mr. Morgan a keen desire to see these places for himself. He had broached the subject to his wife and daughter, and as they had declared themselves not unwilling to accompany him, the trip had been definitely settled.

Mr. Robb had informed Mr. Morgan that any advice or information he might require, he would be able to obtain from the Royal North-West Mounted Police; hence this visit to the Barracks.

When Mr. Morgan had entered the front office, the constable on duty politely rose to his feet and greeted him courteously:

"Good morning, sir. What can I do for you?"

Hiram J. beamed on the constable. This was more the style of address to which he was accustomed. He appraised the smart, soldierly youngster confronting him with obvious approval; in spite of a pronounced discoloration of the latter's right eye, which seemed to hint at recent stormy events.

"Good morning to you, sir," he graciously answered the constable's greeting. "Could I see your commanding officer, do you think?"

"On what business, please, sir?"

"Nothing official. I intend to take a trip up the country with my family; and I have been informed that he might be able to give me a few hints."

The constable invited Mr. Morgan to be seated, while he took that gentleman's card in to the inspector.

While waiting, a movement in one of two steel cages at the back of the office—obviously some kind of cells—attracted the notice of Hiram J. He focused his eyes on the cage, and had a vision of a man, lying on a bunk, who was alternately stretching himself, and rubbing his eyes and head with his hands. Sundry groans, which escaped him during the process, seemed to indicate that he had a certain grudge against the world on this morning. Presently he heaved himself into a sitting posture, propped his head up with his hands, his elbows resting on his knees; and to Hiram J.'s ears floated the potent and illuminating sentence:

"Gosh, my head's splittin'!"

At that moment the constable returned.

"The inspector will see you in a few minutes, sir," he informed Mr. Morgan; and then he turned his attention to the cage and its occupant.

"Hallo, Jim!" he called cheerfully with a grin. "Awake and about already? How are you feeling?"

"Mean as hell! I must have had a peach of a jag on last night."

"You had, and then some!" answered the constable laconically, unlocking the cell-door. "You had better come into the barrack-room and have a wash and spruce-up. You are scheduled for an interview with the magistrate at twelve; and the privilege will probably cost you five dollars." The constable grinned broadly.

The prisoner got slowly to his feet and walked wearily into the office. He was a tall, strongly-built man; but further observations of the features with which Nature had endowed him was rendered well-nigh impossible by the scars of battle which covered him. His clothes may once have looked respectable, but now they appeared as if they had gone through a threshing-machine.

This disreputable-looking object stretched himself painfully, and again he informed the world in general

as to the state of his head. He, however, abruptly stopped his exercises as the constable's right eye happened to come within range of his limited vision.

"Say, Connor, where'd you get that eye?" he demanded in the voice of a man who expects to hear bad news.

"You gave it to me, old son," answered Connor cheerfully.

Jim stared at the constable in horrified silence for a few moments.

"Gosh-ding-it-all!" he burst out at last. "Do you mean to say, I was so far gone, that I started layin' into my own pals?"

"Not as bad as that," reassured the constable. "I just happened to step into a swing you had intended for somebody else."

Jim pondered for a moment. Then he asked for further information. He paid no attention to Hiram J., who formed an interested audience—had probably not even noticed him.

"Say, what was it all about, anyhow, Connor? I remember goin' to that Russian weddin' an' havin' a few. But after that things seem rather muddled. I seem to remember somethin' about a scrap, though, but not what it was all about, or how it started," he finished thoughtfully.

"As far as I can gather, you first got drunk and then patriotic," enlightened Constable Connor. "You commenced by stating that God's country was too good for dirty foreigners, and that you would clear the country of them. And then you manfully commenced by making a start with those present. By the time an S.O.S. had gone forth, and Corporal Wilson and I appeared on the scene to take part in the merry revels, you were holding the floor against all comers; and holding it well! On our arrival the meeting adjourned in a hurry; but as you were still breathing fire and brimstone, we simply had to bring you along to cool off. That's about all."

"And quite enough too," groaned Jim dismally. "Every time I go to one of them Russian feasts I always seem to manage to make about a hundred

kinds of fools of myself. Must be rotten dope they dish out," he mused.

He squinted down at what yesterday morning had been a good suit of clothes, and what he saw did not help to revive his drooping spirits.

"Say, Connor, hadn't I better sneak home and change my togs?" he inquired. "I can't appear before the magistrate like this. My face is bad enough, judgin' from the feel of it, but that I can't change," he sighed ruefully.

"Couldn't risk my reputation by having a pal of mine go through the town looking as—well, what you are looking as," grinned the constable. "So I sent Alec around to your lodgings this morning for a decent outfit. It's all in the barrack-room; so come along."

Jim disappeared, followed by the constable who excused himself to Hiram J. That gentleman, who had been rather amused by the recent proceedings—although the easy camaraderie between officer and prisoner had seemed somewhat out of place, and at variance with his preconceived notions of the workings of the Majesty of the Law—was not left long alone. Almost as soon as Jim and the constable had disappeared, a corporal entered the room, who informed him that the inspector was free to see him.

He was received very heartily by Inspector Trench; and as soon as he had stated his business, and further, that he was a friend of Mr. Robb's, the inspector grew very cordial.

"So you are Robb's friend," he exclaimed. "Robb wrote to me some time ago and informed me that a friend of his was headed this way; but he forgot to mention the name. Have you fixed on any special locality to camp? I suppose you don't intend to roam around like Robb did, seeing you have got your family with you."

"No, I haven't fixed on any place yet. Robb advised me to consult you first."

"Well then, I can point out to you the exact place that would suit you. Clear Water Lake. It is about a seven or eight days' canoe-journey north-west of

here; and an exceptionally good locality for fishing and hunting. As a matter of fact, one of my own men, Sergeant Weston, is up there now, spending a three months' leave on the lake."

"Is that so? Then I can, perhaps, engage him as a guide for us. Of course I am willing to pay him well for his services," suggested Hiram J., the millionaire strong to the fore.

"I am afraid that is quite out of the question," smiled the inspector. "Weston prefers to potter around on his lonesome, without any ties. I am even afraid that he will consider it an unkind act on my part to send you up there to invade his domain. But I am certain that he will render you any assistance you may require; that is, unofficially. And he knows the North from A to Z. He seems to have acquired a positive passion for that part of the world. Summer or winter is all the same to him. On the slightest pretext he will cheerfully disappear into the Great Alone for months at a time. I have often suggested to him that he take up a homestead near the North Pole, and settle there. He is a queer chap in many ways. He even decided to spend his leave up there in preference to going to England."

"That is just the kind of fellow I should want. Don't you think that he could be persuaded to join our party if I made the terms attractive enough?"

The inspector was a little at a loss how to deal tactfully with the situation.

"As I said before, Mr. Morgan, I am afraid that the proposition is not feasible. Sergeant Weston is quite well off; and monetary compensations would in no way tempt him. Besides," continued the inspector hesitatingly, "Sergeant Weston is an English gentleman, and, as you know, we English have funny ideas. I am afraid that he would view any such offer with displeasure; might even consider it an impertinence. Well, there you are," he ended somewhat lamely.

At this point in the proceedings Corporal Wilson, who up to now had formed an interested audience, got up and left the office. Hiram J.'s notion to hire Weston as guide had struck him as so highly

humorous, that he simply had to impart the cheerful news to the constables at once. It would be a choice morsel to dish out to the sergeant on his return, amplified by divers marginal notes, which Wilson would supply free of charge.

"Oh, I think I understand what you are driving at," in the meantime remarked Hiram J., apropos of the inspector's remarks, although the matter was far from clear to him. Why a man, who was content to hold a humble job as a policeman, should jib at a lucrative position as guide to him and party, passed his comprehension. But then these English did have queer notions, he reflected, and he had long ago given up trying to understand them, or their peculiar ways. "Anyhow," he continued, "the fact remains that we shall want a good, reliable guide. Do you know of any you could recommend, Inspector?"

The inspector pondered for a while. Then he had an inspiration.

"The very man you want is Jim Hayes," he exclaimed. "I think he is around the Barracks, somewhere, at this minute. When the truth has to be told," he smiled, "Mr. Hayes has some slight troubles this morning, and is due for a heart-to-heart talk with the magistrate at noon."

Hiram J.'s mind galloped back to the scene he had witnessed in the front office.

"You don't by any chance by Jim Hayes mean a battered, drunken ruffian, whom I saw being led out of one of the cells a little while ago? I remember hearing the constable address him as 'Jim,'" he observed with a slight frown.

"Oh, you saw Jim, did you?" queried the inspector, unperturbed. "I suppose he didn't look his best this morning; seeing that last night he endeavoured to clear out the entire foreign population of this town on his lonesome. And I am not so sure that he wouldn't have succeeded either, if the boys hadn't stepped in and stopped him. Yes, he is the man I mean."

Hiram J. gazed for some moments at the inspector, aghast at what he had heard.

"You surely can't seriously mean to recommend that disreputable, drunken reprobate as guide for my party," he burst out at last. "Surely you must be joking."

"Not at all," cheerfully answered the inspector. "You misjudge Jim Hayes completely. He is neither a drunkard nor a reprobate; but a highly respected member of society and thoroughly reliable. He very seldom drinks at all; and then on occasions only, when he is at leisure. He has been my trusted guide and companion on many trips into the North, and I can assure you that you can't wish for a better or more efficient and reliable man."

"Well, I must admit that you surprise me considerably," said Hiram J., who was far from convinced of the sterling qualities of Mr. Hayes. "The impression I got of the gentleman was far from favourable or reassuring. I must say, that if he is a normal example of the reliable and respectable citizens you have got up here, then I really think that the local community must be of a rather peculiar constitution, to express matters mildly."

"Well, yes, I suppose they may seem a rum lot to a stranger who doesn't know them or their ways," said the inspector. "But you see, conditions in the North are peculiar. These people have to lead a hard life in which self-reliance and self-preservation are the two main factors. This naturally makes them hard and strong; in virtues as well as vices. Whenever they set out to do a thing, whether good or bad, they are determined to go the whole hog, to speak in the vernacular. And when these sons of the wilderness come into town after a hard trip, they naturally want to play; and, well, the pace they set in their frolics may seem rather extreme to the uninitiated observer, I admit. They get very primitive through their constant close communion with nature, and, therefore, they can't be judged by the generally accepted standards of civilization.

"As far as booze is concerned we are up against a particularly hard proposition," and a shade of annoyance crossed the inspector's face. "The Government

has decided—mainly on account of the Indians—to declare the district within a certain radius of this town for 'dry territory.' The great idea being, of course, to prevent booze from being shipped to Portage Bend, and from there being distributed over the Reserves. The scheme would have been quite sound if the railway had been the only road of approach; but there are hundreds of trails from all the points of the compass which converge towards this place, so it is as easy as falling off a log to smuggle booze in. A man can even smuggle booze into most of the Reserves without getting within miles of this place. It would take about five hundred men to effectually cope with the situation in the spirit of the Government fiat; and they expect me and my four subordinates to do it on our lonesome! We do the best we can, of course; but, frankly, our best doesn't amount to much. This town is simply overrun with boot-leggers and blind pigs. As soon as we raid one place, another is sure to spring up somewhere else. And the results are simply appalling. Formerly a man would take a drink or two when thirst and leisure coincided. But now the proposition is different. Since this place went dry it takes such a lot of scheming and manœuvring to get hold of booze, that when a man succeeds, he feels so elated that he simply must sit down and empty the whole bottle in one sitting; in a spirit of defiant bravado, I suppose. And the vile stuff these boot-leggers sell for exorbitant prices is practically bottled hell-fire; so when a man has had a few hearty draughts of that stuff, he naturally goes on the rampage—like Jim Hayes did last night. It is a rotten proposition; but what can you do? I have pointed out to the Powers in report after report, that the remedy is more destructive than the disease; but they simply won't listen to me. I am awfully sorry," he suddenly interrupted his discourse with an apologetic smile. "I am afraid I have been boring you. But this booze-question is my pet bogie, and I always seem to overflow when that question crops up."

"You have not been boring me at all," answered

Hiram J. promptly. "As a matter of fact, I was very interested. You have helped me tremendously to see these people in their proper light. I can quite understand, now, how a man like Hayes can be a bit both of an angel and a devil, so to speak. Anyhow, if you say that he is a good man, it's good enough for me. Would it be too much trouble for you to approach him with regard to the proposition?"

"Not at all. Only too pleased to be of service. If he should decide to take on the job, and I am practically convinced that he will, you can safely leave all the details of the preparations for the trip in his hands. I suppose you have a fairly size-able outfit?"

"Well," smiled Hiram J., "my outfit is what you might describe as slightly voluminous. You see, I have got women-folks in the party; and you may know that travelling with ladies means a pretty hefty luggage."

"I do," said the inspector laconically; he was a married man. "Anyhow," he continued, "I should think the best scheme for you would be to hire a York boat in addition to the canoes you will require up there. To pack the whole outfit for such a big party in canoes only would be wellnigh impracticable. But we will discuss all that with Jim Hayes when he is in his right mind again, say this afternoon or to-morrow morning. I am sorry that my own time is rather limited; but I can assure you that both I and my boys will be glad to render you any assistance we can, as far as our duties permit."

The preparations for the expedition progressed quickly and efficiently after Jim Hayes had taken charge. He had decided to take on the job as guide; and Hiram J. discovered to his satisfaction that the inspector's eulogy of Hayes had not been an exaggeration. He further discovered, as the scars of battle healed, that these had hidden particularly pleasant and cheerful features.

The inspector's promise of assistance from him and his "boys" also proved to be no idle form of speech. Especially were the corporal and the constables taking an unbounded interest in the party and their affairs.

At least for the first few days. Any of them who had a spare moment would rush off and volunteer assistance, particularly if it could be reasonably expected that this would bring them in the close vicinity of the beautiful Miss Morgan.

There was an unusually energetic polishing of boots and buttons in the barrack-room during those first days, and the best tunics and riding-breeches were in constant evidence. But as the goddess, at whose shrine they were worshipping, received their advances with more or less supercilious tolerance only, their enthusiasm gradually waned. Bryan was the first deserter from the ranks of the admirers. One day he had tried to indulge in a few mild and harmless pleasantries while in Miss Morgan's company, only to be left with the firm, though perplexing, conviction that he had been grossly impertinent. Then he considered it time to quit.

However, thanks to the efforts of their corps of assistants, voluntary and hired, the Morgans were able to start out on their journey on the morning of their sixth day's stay at Portage Bend. For the first three days their imposing-looking fleet, consisting of one York boat and six canoes, was towed up the river by one of the tugs belonging to the lumber company, hired for the purpose; but after that time-limit they were left to their own devices, as the tug was unable to proceed farther owing to the numerous rapids ahead.

But under Jim Hayes' able leadership all difficulties were capably and efficiently overcome; and already in the early afternoon of the ninth day they had conquered their worst obstacle—Gulch Rapids—and had safely brought their flotilla to the south end of Clear Water Lake. It had, however, been a heart-breaking effort to bring the big York boat up the rapids; but by the help of ropes and tackle and much profanity, this had at last been successfully accomplished.

After a council of war between Hiram J. and Hayes it was decided to camp where they were for the night, as all hands were rather weary after their struggles with the rapids; and in the morning they would get

hold of Sergeant Weston, and consult him as to the best place for a permanent camp.

Their camp had a most animated appearance. The York boats and the canoes lined the foreshore, and behind, against the dark green forest, the tents showed up their snowy whiteness; while men were coming and going, and camp-fires crackled here and there.

Hiram J. had by now completely entered into the spirit of things. He had become on quite intimate terms with Jim Hayes and the other hands, and was commencing to enjoy himself thoroughly. And Mrs. Morgan, who was a kind-hearted soul, unspoilt by riches and Society, wholeheartedly followed her husband's lead.

The only two who held aloof were Miss Morgan and the maid, Marie; Miss Morgan because she considered she owed a certain reserve to her status as a prominent member of Society; Marie—née Mary Donovan—because she thought it only right and proper to follow Miss Morgan's lead.

While camp was being prepared Miss Morgan had wandered down to the lake shore; and as she watched the calm, cool wilderness lake, she felt tempted to cruise around for a while in the light canoe which was her own property. She promptly launched the little craft and set out.

For a while she paddled along the shore, enjoying the cool, quiet afternoon; and then, without giving particular heed to where she was going, she rounded the point into Gulch River with never a thought for the strong current and the roaring rapids ahead.

## CHAPTER IV

As Weston and Angus beheld the vision of the girl in the canoe they grew so dumbfounded that they ceased paddling for a few moments, and sat staring at the, to them, inexplicable apparition of a white girl in a canoe in that part of the country! The sergeant was the first to regain his wits.

"Great Scott!" he cried. "She is heading straight for the rapids." He lifted his voice to a shout: "Hey, there! Turn in towards the shore! Danger ahead!"

The girl looked up, startled at these sudden shouts; but apart from that she gave no sign that she had heard the warning.

"Hey!" shouted the sergeant again. "Rapids ahead! Turn towards shore!"

They saw that she now understood; but they also saw, to their horror, that she was unable to turn her canoe in the strong current.

"Quick, Angus! We must catch up with her and I'll board her canoe! She isn't able to handle it herself!" panted the sergeant as he dug his paddle viciously into the water.

In a few minutes they were alongside the run-away. With a warning: "Sit tight!" the sergeant grabbed the stern of the girl's canoe; and while Angus was furiously back-paddling, he caught the gunwale on each side of the stern. Slowly—still holding on to his own paddle—he slid on his stomach over the bow of their own canoe and into the stern of that of the girl's, dragging his legs after him. It was a manœuvre which had to be done smoothly and unhurriedly to avoid disaster in the wild-growing current; but, in spite of the handicap, only a few seconds had elapsed before Weston was safely kneeling in the other craft.

"Sheer off, Angus!" he shouted; and then to the girl: "Stop paddling! Lean forward as far as you can and hang on to each side with your hands! Too late to turn! We have to shoot the rapids!"

For perhaps the first time in her life Miss Morgan obeyed another person promptly without hesitation or cavilling. The swirling, rushing waters around her and the angry roar of the rapids ahead warned her that this was not a time for idle exchanges of arguments.

Soon the canoe shot into the Gulch, the waters boiling and roaring around it as it raced forward. The sergeant gave one more warning shout:

"Sit quite still, and hang on tight! There is no danger!" And he hoped he was telling the truth.

Now they were in the grip of the rapids, and the canoe plunged madly forward on the crest of the boiling waves. Weston swung his paddle harder than he had ever done before in his life, his mouth set in a straight, grim line; and his keen eyes incessantly searched the boiling mass of water ahead for those signs which would warn him where danger lay. To his companion, who crouched low, both hands tightly gripping the gunwales, it sounded as if Bedlam had been turned loose, and that they were in a devil's cauldron. The sound from the angry, raging waters roared in her ears, and the spray swept over her like a heavy shower of rain, and stung her face; while she seemed to be hurled through space at an incredible speed. But almost before she had time to get any clear impression of what was going on around her, the uproar seemed to subside; and soon she felt the canoe gliding along on smoother water again. She straightened up, and saw that they were on the river below the rapids, and that the canoe was heading straight for the bank.

"It is all right. We land here," remarked a cheerful voice behind her; and almost as soon as it was said the canoe grated on the sand by the landing-place at the portage.

Miss Morgan clambered ashore; while the sergeant

turned around to see how Angus had fared. To his great relief he saw Angus paddling serenely towards them; and he turned his attention to the girl, who was standing on the shore, watching him curiously.

For a few seconds they sized each other up in silence; and the result was that they both experienced a feeling of surprise.

The events on the river had passed too quickly for them to be able to take stock of each other, and Miss Morgan had therefore expected her rescuer to be a rough son of the great open spaces. But now she discovered that, although his dress came up to sample, his clear-cut, clean-shaven features, which bore the unmistakable stamp of refinement and breeding, gave the lie to this supposition. And she wondered who he was, and how he happened to be there.

The sergeant, on the other hand, had expected to find that the girl was the wife or the daughter of one of the denizens of the North; but he found that he had to revise his opinion. Although the sergeant's experience of women's garments had grown somewhat rusty, he at once noted that the frock which the girl was wearing could only have been worn by one of the lucky on whom bank-managers beam; and that effectively did away with his theory that she was connected with any of the inhabitants of the wilderness. Even a Hudson's Bay factor would not be able to furnish that kind of dress to any of his women-folks. He was, further, not blind to the fact that she was beautiful, and that she had Society stamped largely over her—and he marvelled. For a well-dressed, beautiful Society-woman had been a hitherto unknown specimen up in those parts of the world.

As the sergeant felt that the silence was becoming slightly embarrassing, he bestirred himself and climbed out of the canoe.

"I hope you didn't get very wet," he addressed the girl, removing his battered hat.

"Not very, thank you," she answered courteously.

"Sorry I shouted somewhat loudly at you; but there wasn't much time," continued the sergeant.

"It was a bit startling, I must admit. But, as you

say, there was not much time for the niceties of convention. I am, however, very grateful to you for coming to my assistance."

"Please don't mention it," answered Weston, and again silence settled down over them. The sergeant groped around frantically in his mind for something bright to say; but for once his conversational abilities refused to come up to the mark. The truth was, that this vision of style and beauty had been so startling and unexpected, that he felt slightly confused and painfully conscious of his own shabby appearance. But the arrival of Angus furnished a welcome diversion. As he beached his canoe beside the one by which the girl and Weston were standing, Weston turned to him and shouted the first words which entered his head, so as to break that uncomfortable silence:

"Did you ship any water, Angus?"

"Huh!" snorted Angus contemptuously; and he wondered how the sergeant—normally the sanest of men—could frame such an unreasonable and idiotic question. But the interlude had given Weston time to collect his disorganized faculties, mental and conversational.

"I suppose your party is somewhere around?" he inquired politely of the girl.

"Yes. They are camping at the south end of Clear Water Lake. My parents and I are going to spend some time up there, fishing and shooting."

This information fairly staggered the sergeant, and acted on him as a distinct shock. One of the chief attractions of Clear Water Lake in his eyes had been its perfect privacy and the entire absence of intruders. And now it looked as if his pet, private domain was to be invaded by a swarm of what he mentally styled "trippers!" He felt quite peeved and annoyed at the prospect; but his innate courtesy came to his rescue in time, and enabled him to answer her politely, though without any undue enthusiasm:

"Are you really? Then I shall probably see you up there. I am camping on Clear Water myself."

"Oh," she exclaimed. "Then you are probably Sergeant Weston?"

"Yes, I am," he admitted with considerable surprise. "But how did you guess?"

"That was really not very difficult. You see, my father, Mr. Morgan—I am Miss Morgan, by the way—saw your inspector at Portage Bend, and he told my father that you were camping up here. As a matter of fact, the inspector also told my father that you might be able to assist us in finding a suitable site for our permanent camp."

"I'll only be too pleased to help you," answered Weston politely; but the unkind thoughts milling about in his head about his superior officer would have formed ample material for a court martial. "By the way," he continued, "don't you think we had better get started for your camp? They may be becoming anxious at your absence. I'll pack your canoe across the portage for you, if you don't mind."

"Thanks ever so much. Yes, I suppose I had better get back."

Weston thereupon informed Angus, who had remained seated in the canoe, that he was going to see Miss Morgan across the portage; but that he would be back presently and help pack their own outfit across. Angus's only answer was a curt nod.

"Your servant seems to be rather a surly individual," remarked Miss Morgan presently, as they were striding along the trail, Weston carrying her canoe on his head.

"My what?" asked the sergeant in surprise.

"Isn't that Indian your servant?"

"Angus? Good Lord, no!" chuckled Weston. "He is a great pal of mine. And, by the way, he is not an Indian, but a half-breed. Angus Mackenzie is his name, and he is inordinately proud of his Scotch blood, which is not, I must admit, very much in evidence in his general appearance. And he is far from surly; only somewhat reserved and taciturn."

Miss Morgan made no comment on this. She was, frankly, not a bit interested in Angus, his antecedents or peculiarities. But what did strike her was that the sergeant had a somewhat peculiar taste in the selection of his friends; and he accordingly sank considerably

in her estimation. But of that the sergeant was sublimely unaware, nor would it have bothered him particularly had he known.

When they arrived at the other end of the portage Miss Morgan thanked him, and declared that it was not necessary for him to see her to the camp, as she was quite capable of handling the canoe for the rest of the distance.

Weston watched her till her canoe had disappeared round the bend into the lake.

"Darn pretty; but looks like a confoundedly uppish kind of a dame," he confided to himself. "It will be becoming lovely around here, if the rest of the outfit is like her."

And he returned very thoughtfully down the trail. He was feeling rather abused, and had unpleasant forebodings for the future.

## CHAPTER V

In the hustle and bustle of preparing camp Miss Morgan's absence had passed unnoticed for some time. It was only when all the preparations were nearly finished, and her mother happened to want her, that it was discovered that she was missing. Hiram J. immediately started out to investigate, and ran into Jim Hayes.

"Have you seen my daughter, Hayes?" he inquired.

"No. I ain't saw her for a spell. Ain't she in her tent?"

"No. Neither her mother nor the maid have seen her for some time."

"She's gone for a stroll in the woods most likely, or for a paddle on the lake. But I'll find out."

Hayes strolled over to a group of the half-breeds; and on questioning them, he found a man who remembered having seen Miss Morgan launch her

canoe. Further inquiries elicited the startling information from another man that he had seen her paddling towards Gulch River.

"Gosh-damn-it, you all-fired fool!" burst fiercely from Hayes, when he heard this. "Why didn't you tell me at the time?"

"Me no think she damn fool go into river," explained the half-breed in extenuation.

"You no think!" fairly shouted Jim Hayes in his rage. "That's the trouble with all you guys, that you never do think nothin', 'cept how to dodge work. Don't you know that a cheechako don't know nothin' of this country, an' is liable to do any damn fool trick, you——!" And Jim Hayes gave his tongue free rein for a spell.

"Come on you, Albert!" he shouted to one of the men, as soon as his store of swear-words was fairly exhausted. "You an' me'll chase after her!"

As they hurried down to the lake they met Mr. Morgan.

"What is the hurry, Hayes?" he inquired. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing much," answered Hayes reassuringly. "I just found out that Miss Morgan has gone on the lake, and I thought I'd better go along an' collect her."

"Thank you so much. Tell her her mother wants her."

"Gosh, I hope we'll be able to deliver that there message," muttered Hayes under his breath, as he once more turned towards the shore.

Just as Hayes and Albert were about to push off Hiram J., who had followed them, exclaimed:

"Here she is coming, Hayes."

Hayes looked up, and sure enough, there was Miss Morgan just appearing from behind a point, and came paddling steadily along, straight for the camp.

"Gosh darn it, if that ain't some relief! I was sure some worried," he ejaculated fervently.

"Worried?" asked Hiram J., surprised. "Why?"

"Well, as I've made a break, I might as well give you the whole thing straight. One of the men told

me that he'd seen Miss Morgan paddle towards the river, an' as that particular river ain't what might be called a safe playground for any tenderfoot—let alone a girl—I got some uneasy. There is an ugly current in there, and then them rapids!" Jim Hayes ended with an eloquent gesture.

"Good God, man!" exclaimed Hiram J., aghast. "You weren't thinking that my daughter . . . ?" He couldn't get the words out.

"In such cases I don't think, but go to find out," answered Hayes succinctly. "But luckily everything is fine an' dandy now. That fool must-o'-been mistaken who saw her turn into the river."

A few minutes afterwards Miss Morgan beached her canoe near where the men were standing.

"Hallo, daughter!" greeted Hiram J., as soon as she had stepped ashore; while Hayes and Albert lifted her canoe out of the water and placed it bottom up on the beach. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Oh, I have just been for a little trip on the lake and down the river."

"What's that?" broke in Hayes sharply. "Down the river? How far'd you go?"

Jim Hayes was not a favourite with Miss Morgan. She found his manner towards her far too familiar, and lacking in the respect she considered her due; and she thought it was about time to show him his proper place. She, therefore, turned to him and said icily and with considerable hauteur:

"I cannot quite see how that is any concern of yours, Mr. Hayes."

"Excuse me for contradictin' you, miss," answered Hayes evenly, not a bit abashed. "I'm paid to look after the welfare an' safety of your little lot; and as long as I hold that job it's my business to see that none of you go an' get mixed up in no trouble. You must remember, miss, that you are in a country you don't know nothin' about, an' as long as I have the re-spon-si-bi-lity"—long words rarely came readily to Hayes' tongue—"of lookin' after this picnic, I shall thank you to come an' see me before you

start on any trip, so that I can tell you where it's safe to play, an' where it ain't. Ain't that so, Mr. Morgan?"

To Miss Morgan's chagrin her father promptly deserted his old ally, and went over to the enemy.

"Hayes is quite right, my dear," he said. "And I am sure that you also see the justness of his point of view."

Miss Morgan thought of rebellion for a few moments; but being at heart a fair-minded girl, she determined at last that she would only belittle herself by such an attitude.

"Very well. I shall give you a full account of the afternoon's events," she announced a little defiantly. "First I paddled around the lake for a while, and then I turned down the river. As I was paddling along, I heard somebody shouting to me to turn the canoe towards the shore; and on looking up I saw two men who were sitting in a canoe which had just turned out from another river down there, just above the rapids. As the current was too strong for me to turn, the strange canoe came alongside my own; one of the men climbed into my canoe; and he shot the rapids with me."

"God'll-mighty!" broke in Hayes, pop-eyed with excitement. "Do you mean that one of them fellars jumped into your canoe in that fierce current by Grassy Hill River? It can't be did!"

"He did it nevertheless!" was Miss Morgan's rather sharp retort.

"Was he an Injun?"

"No. He was a white man. As a matter of fact, he informed me that he was Sergeant Weston."

Hayes smote his thigh a resounding slap.

"I might a-known it!" he boomed. "There is only him would a-tried a foolhardy trick like that!" Then he eyed Miss Morgan curiously for a few seconds. "I suppose you don't know that you were in some considerable danger, young lady?" he queried at last.

"Oh, there did not seem to be much danger," answered the girl shortly. She was wishing that

Hayes would speak a little more grammatically, and that he would not address her as "young lady."

"Well, let me tell you there was, and then some!" snapped Hayes. "It didn't seem no danger to you. 'Cause why? 'Cause you had with you in the canoe one of the finest canoe-men in the whole of this part of the country. There is only a few Injuns who can beat Weston at handling a canoe; but no white man that I know of. And let me tell you something else. Perhaps you noticed them stakes in that backwater below the rapids? You didn't? Well they are there —about a dozen of them. An' you know what they are? They are the head-stones over the graves of people who didn't think there was no danger in shootin' them rapids; an' they wasn't all tenderfeet either! And as to shiftin' from one canoe to another in that current—well, there ain't many who could a-done it. I for one don't think I could have found the nerve to try; an' even if I had, I'd most likely have upset the whole box of tricks. So you were mighty lucky, fallin' in with Weston!" He stopped, almost out of breath. It was seldom that he waxed eloquent; but if he first got properly launched, he shot out the words as fast as he could, with a fine disregard for grammar and punctuation.

Hiram J., who had listened to Hayes' outburst in a silence which grew more and more horrified, now chimed in:

"Do you mean to tell me, Hayes, that my daughter's life was actually in immediate danger?" he almost gasped, his cheeks paling.

"Just so!" answered Hayes laconically.

"But this is terrible. How could you be so reckless, daughter?" he inquired, some reproach in his voice.

"I didn't know there was any danger, father," she answered somewhat uncertainly and contritely. And she spoke the truth. Until Hayes' words had made the situation clear to her, she had merely considered her experience an interesting and slightly exciting incident. And she reflected that she, perhaps, had treated somewhat nonchalantly the man who had

apparently saved her life. "Anyhow," she continued, "Sergeant Weston didn't seem to treat the affair as if there had been any elements of danger in it."

"No, he wouldn't," snorted Hayes scornfully. "He's the kind of guy who'd pull you out from in front of an automobile, an' then tell you in his best dude-fashion that of course there wasn't no danger; but he was afraid you might get your shoes dusty." And Hayes grinned at what he considered to be a neat and particularly illustrative simile. "Anyhow," he continued, "the court havin' heard the evidence we might as well adjourn. Is Weston comin' this way to-night, miss?"

"I really forgot to ask him," answered Miss Morgan rather defiantly. She had an uneasy feeling that she was not exactly coming out of the situation with flying colours; especially as she found Hayes' eyes fixed on her, watching her curiously. "Anyhow, I told him that we wanted to consult him with regard to a camp-site; and he said he would be pleased to assist us." Then she had an inspiration. "Oh, wait a minute. The sergeant helped me carry my canoe across the portage, and before we left the lower end of the portage he told the man who was with him that he would be back and help carry their outfit across the portage. That sounds as if he were coming this way, does it not?"

"It does that," answered Hayes shortly. The situation was a bit beyond him. Even common courtesy ought to have prompted the girl to invite Weston to visit the camp, he reflected, and she had not even asked him whence he came or whither he was going. But then, of course, these folks from "outside" did have queer ways and notions. . . .

"I think I'll run across to the portage an' see what ol' Wess is doin'," he said to Mr. Morgan, interrupting his reflections.

"Do! And bring him along with you if you can," said Hiram J. heartily. "I am very anxious to see him, and thank him for the great service he has rendered my daughter."

The party split up. Hiram J. and his daughter went

towards the camp, and Hayes put one of the canoes into the water.

"Won't ol' Wess be de-lighted when I tell him that the brass trumpets are waitin' for him at this here camp?" he inquired of himself with a grin as he paddled along. "I don't think! I'd better keep close about that thankin'-business or chances are that he will fight shy of my little flock."

He discovered Weston and Angus at the near end of the portage, about to load their outfit into their canoe.

"Hello, Wess! Hello, Angus!" he shouted cheerily, as soon as he was within hailing distance.

Weston and Angus straightened up from their task, and discovered the lone man in the canoe.

"Hang it, if it isn't Jim Hayes," exclaimed Weston. "Wonder what he is doing up here? Probably he is attached to Miss Morgan's party," he answered his own question.

Soon Jim Hayes had beached his canoe, and joyfully the three exchanged the compliments of the season.

"What are you doing up here, Jim?" queried Weston as soon as the formalities were over.

"Playin' nursemaid to a party of big bugs from Noo York City, of both sexes," answered Jim promptly.

"So I guessed. Who are they, anyhow?"

"Waal," drawled Jim. "There is first Pa Morgan, a millionaire, I reckon, judgin' from the way he flings his dollars around. Then there is Ma Morgan; an' the daughter; an' a skirt what does the chores around the ladies. Then there is ten breeds, an' old Ben Giddy as cook. Gosh, some little outfit ourn, believe mu! There is a tent for Pa an' Ma, one for daughter, an' one for the skirt; an' then what they call their livin' tent, an' all the rest of it. We look like a young army camp when we are fixed. We are travellin' doo—doo—— Well, somethin' I read on a railway folder once."

"De luxe, perhaps you mean?" suggested Weston with a grin.

"That's the baby, Wess! Doo loox. We are travellin' doo loox, we are!"

"I understand the party are going to camp up on the lake, is that right?"

"That's the big idea. You heard it from Miss Morgan, I gather. I understand you an' her had a picnic down the river this afternoon."

"Can't women ever keep their mouths shut?" queried the sergeant somewhat petulantly, looking slightly embarrassed.

"They never could," observed Hayes sagely. "Anyhow, truth to tell, I kind o' forced the story out of her. I put it to her, that as guidin' angel to the party, I had to have a line on all their deeds an' misdeeds; an' then she up an' gave me the straight dope. I gathered from what she told me that there was some doin's."

"Oh, there was nothing to it," said Weston impatiently. "I saw she was a tenderfoot by the way she handled her paddle; and I had to do something to avert a catastrophe. Anyhow, she's got plenty of nerve. Took the whole thing as cool as a cucumber."

"That's where you are wrong, Wess. She told me she didn't think there was no danger; so what kept her cool was iggonorance, and not guts!"

The sergeant winced slightly. He considered the common term a little too gross in its application to the vision of style and beauty which he had beheld a short while ago; and he decided to change the conversation promptly.

"Look here, Jim," he said. "Correct me if I am wrong. But certain marks on your face seem to indicate stormy events in a not distant past. What have you been up to?"

"Got drunk in the Bend; an' tried to clean up a Russian weddin'," explained Hayes shortly. He had a strong feeling that Weston's query smacked strongly of tactlessness. "Got fined five dollars," he added as an afterthought. "Anyhow, I thought them scars would have disappeared by now," he ended as he thoughtfully stroked his face.

"They almost have. But they are still discernible

to the keen gaze of vast experience," grinned the sergeant. "Did you get pinched, Jim, since you got fined?"

"You said it! Wils an' Connor officiated at the merry festival. They had to!" added Hayes in extenuation of what might on the face of it appear as an unkind act on the part of friends. "You see, I'd got goin' so good, that they had to do it to stop me. I biffed Connor in the eye," he finished the brief summary of his misdeeds.

"Biffed Connor? Why?" asked Weston in surprise.

"Accidental like. He walked into a wallop intended for one of them bohunks."

"It must have been a whale of a scrap!" commented Weston, grinning broadly.

"Tolerably so. I don't remember much o' it myself. Was too jagged. But from the feel o' my face the next mornin' an' judgin' from what the boys told me, it must have been a humdinger. However, that is not what I came to see you about." The post-mortem had commenced to pall on Hayes. "Mr. Morgan sent me along. He wants your expert advice on fixin' on a camp-site for them; seein' you are the rulin' nabob up here. Are you comin' along?"

"Might as well," answered Weston, who was curious to see the whole outfit. "Let's get started, if you think you can stop gassing long enough."

"Who is gassin'?" demanded Hayes over his shoulder as his canoe shot out on the river. "You are, Wess!" he shouted when he thought he had gained a safe distance. "You are as full o' wind as any o' them Ottawa politicians!" And he backed up his parting shot with an insulting gesture of his fingers towards his nose.

The sod which Weston promptly threw at him, missed by only the fraction of an inch; but an energetic spurt soon placed him out of range.

Weston was received very graciously by the Morgans; but for the first uncomfortable minutes he earnestly wished himself elsewhere. If he could have known that he was destined to listen to such tripe

(his own mental characteristic) as his "splendid coolness and bravery in saving our daughter's life under very difficult circumstances," etc., he would have given the camp a wide berth. But as it was, he was fairly caught; and there was nothing for it but to take his medicine like a man.

Eventually the feast of reason and flow of soul petered out, to his intense satisfaction; and a council of war was convened with the sergeant acting as chief speaker and expert adviser.

He gladdened the hearts of his audience by announcing that he knew of an almost ideal campsite for them. The place he had in mind was on the eastern shore of the lake, some three miles up. It was on a sandy bay, sheltered by two points, which curved out into the lake like two horns, their tips converging. Between the two tips was a narrow, deep entrance into the sheltered bay, which was deep and roomy. The beach surrounding the bay was flat and grassy, and the whole was surrounded by spruce-clad hills. It was a pleasing vista which he rolled up before them, and his hearers rejoiced.

It was at once proposed and carried that they move up to this promised land on the following morning. The whole meeting was so charged with good-will, and Weston's hearers exuded such a strong spirit of geniality, that he found himself, to his subsequent surprise, offering his services in fixing the camp; an offer which was promptly and gratefully accepted.

The council then rose, and Weston was invited to take supper with the Morgans. He promptly accepted, as he was eager to get to know as much as possible about his new neighbours. He was already inclined to like Mr. and Mrs. Morgan; but about the daughter he kept an open mind, beyond admitting to himself that she was certainly pleasing to the eyes.

After supper Mr. Morgan wanted to know all about the fishing and shooting; and it was quite late when he at last broke up, after having delighted his hosts by presenting them with a haunch of venison.

The Morgan family in full strength watched him and Angus set out for their island home. As the

canoe gradually was drawing away on the dark lake in the gathering twilight, Hiram J. remarked:

"That seems an excellent young man, and a thorough gentleman!" He had been observing and appraising Weston closely, and the net result of his observations was summed up in that remark, and a mental twinge of embarrassment, which he felt when he remembered that he had actually intended to offer Weston a job as guide!

## CHAPTER VI

Hiram J. and party all agreed on the following morning that the camp-site was all that the sergeant had promised. Hiram J. declared that the place was "just right"; Mrs. Morgan that it was "just cute"; while Miss Morgan agreed, but substituted the more dignified adjective "delightful."

Especially was the bay—with its bottom of smooth, white sand—voted an attraction; and already on the first morning of their stay at the camp, a procession of the complete Morgan family—attired in dressing-gowns over bathing-suits—could have been seen winding its way towards the bay for a morning dip. This bathing-parade caused not a little consternation amongst the half-breeds. To them mixed bathing was an unknown sport, and they unanimously voted that this particular pastime of the white people smacked strongly of indecency. But the Morgans remained blissfully unaware of the fact that their bathing-parade outraged the finer feelings of their dusky retainers; and even if they had known, it is an open question whether the knowledge would have caused them any loss of sleep.

The camp was rapidly run up under the able and energetic supervision of Weston and Hayes. Weston

had suggested building log-cabins; but this proposal had been energetically vetoed by the Morgans. They all declared that living under canvas would give them a more free and easy feeling of "roughing it." A concession was made in regard to Ben Giddy, the cook, who soon found himself sole and absolute ruler of a roomy cook-shack.

A rough stone jetty was run into the bay in order to reduce to a minimum the acrobatics attendant on climbing in and out of canoes; and on the top of the highest hill by the camp a kind of summer-house with rustic seats had been erected, principally for the convenience of Mrs. Morgan, who declared that she was getting too old for too much gadding about. And in this aerie—from which she had a splendid view of the lake with its dark-green islands, and the surrounding spruce-clad hills and ridges—she spent many happy hours in the company of strong, silent men, and weak, clinging women—the brain-children of her favourite authors.

The other members of the party gave themselves up to the pleasures of the gun and rod.

Weston kindly offered to initiate Miss Morgan into the ways and peculiarities of the country for the first days or so; only to find out that he had created for himself a veritable Frankenstein monster. He simply could not get rid of his self-appointed job, which he had intended to be purely temporary. He was not told directly that he was expected to look after Miss Morgan. He was simply asked when parting each night what time he would be around to pick up the girl on the following morning; and he frankly lacked the moral courage to stick up for his rights as sole arbiter of his destinies for fear of appearing churlish and unneighbourly. And, besides, he considered himself as a kind of host, and had a hazy notion that it was in some way up to him to do the honours. But, he admitted, the present situation was a bit thick.

He cudgelled his brains for a not too pointed and unostentatious way out of his dilemma; but the normally vivid cells for once seemed to have succumbed to a state of coma. So he decided that

he had to accept the situation with as good grace as possible, if not with unrestrained cheer.

He found Miss Morgan a little difficult. She was exacting and not a little inclined to be haughty and imperious. Already from the start he discovered in her a pronounced lack of due and proper enthusiasm for her surroundings; and, immediately on his mettle, he at once commenced to point out to her the various wonders and beauties of the country. But his reformatory efforts fell on barren soil. His most enthusiastic panegyrics were met with a rather indifferent: "Oh, yes. The scenery is quite nice, I suppose; but terribly monotonous." And, once, when he was cheerfully expounding the sterling qualities and virtues of the inhabitants, she interrupted him by saying that to her they appeared a crowd of rough, rude, and rather dirty ruffians.

Under the circumstances Weston found his earnest endeavours so much waste of breath, and soon gave up his efforts.

All in all, he found that his pleasant scheme for a quiet, enjoyable holiday had sprung a leak; but he decided to keep the good ship floating.

However, he was careful to keep his grievances strictly private. Not even to his cronies, Jim Hayes and Angus, did he divulge his dark secret, for fear of having them secretly gloating over his self-inflicted misery. To screen his perplexity from prying eyes he strove to present a consistently cheerful front to his surroundings; and he succeeded so well that Hayes and Angus got ideas which would have brought him to the utmost edge of vexation, had he been aware of them. That Weston, who was famed for his proclivity for chasing around on his lonesome without any ties, should suddenly have chosen to roam constantly around with a beautiful girl, could only have one meaning, decided Hayes and Angus in their simplicity of mind. That their comrade was merely being driven by force of circumstances did not even occur to them.

Angus confined himself to shaking his head and murmuring the Cree equivalent for: "Boys will be

boys," and finding himself more or less deserted, he gave himself up to the congenial task of loafing. He could now mostly be found amongst the waiting members of the Camp Morgan crew, smoking, chatting, and taking his ease generally. So he was far from heartbroken at the turn of events. As a matter of fact, he was beginning to feel that the outing was developing into something very like the ideal, as far as he was concerned.

Jim Hayes was also inclined to view the situation with satisfaction. He was, of course, genuinely concerned to see Weston fall for a pretty-faced doll, as he unkindly expressed it; but at the same time his concern did not blind his view of the silver lining to the clouds. Miss Morgan always had managed to rub him the wrong way; and now she was off his hands, he thought complacently.

And Hiram J. felt that things had arranged themselves to his entire and unqualified satisfaction. With the sergeant as his daughter's guide he was free to appropriate Jim Hayes for his sole and undivided disposal; and the two roamed joyfully around together, Hiram J. feeling like a boy playing hookey from school.

Miss Morgan and Weston on their part explored the woods and the lake. At first the girl was not a steady performer with the gun; and consequently Weston had to introduce her to easy targets in the form of partridges with an optimistic kind of a disposition. These deluded birds would stick ruggedly to their feeding-ground, when instinct ought to have warned them that they had urgent business elsewhere; and several fell victims to Miss Morgan's wobbly gun. But under the sergeant's able tutelage, and through constant practice, she soon advanced so far that she began considering sitting birds unworthy as sporting propositions.

In the evenings they would take a canoe and pay visits to the trout and bass, which were philosophizing in the bays of the lake. Being unsophisticated fish, as yet unversed in the guiles of this guileful world, they would go with vim and pleased anticipation for those, apparently choice, morsels which were so freely offered;

only to be hauled into the canoe, dangling from a hook—wiser but sadder fish.

So the days glided peacefully along at Clear Water Lake.

But there was at least one person beside Weston who did not look on the expedition with unfurrowed and serene brow.

This other person was the ladies' maid, Marie. She was frankly bored stiff.

She had felt considerable qualms about the enterprise from the first; but prospects had appeared to her a little brighter after she had heard that there was every possibility of a sergeant of police being in the near vicinity of the party during their sojourn in the wilderness.

Marie's father was a respected member of the Brooklyn Police, and she thought that this circumstance would form a bond between her and the sergeant which might lead to pleasant intercourse between the two. For, be it whispered, Marie was a hopeless flirt, and to her masculine admiration was the salt of life.

But Marie was also a young lady with keen perceptions, and after she had first seen the sergeant, she had promptly, though regretfully, ruled him out as a possible playmate; especially after she had seen how easily and naturally he had slipped into the position of guide, philosopher and friend to her young mistress.

Thereupon she had cast speculative eyes on the other males of the party in search of a suitable companion; but she had drawn a blank. The only possible candidate was Jim Hayes; but him she found to be utterly lacking in finesse, and besides, he was far from being "distangwe." That is how she pronounced it. For Marie was a shrewd young woman, and when she, as Mary Donovan, had decided to embark on a career as ladies' maid, she had keenly appreciated the fact that all respectable ladies' maids ought to be French, or at least ought to give people the impression that they were. As a start in the right direction she had first shed the homely Mary and substituted its French equivalent, and then she had endeavoured to cultivate a French accent. She had made a modest start by

ending all sentences by a "yes?" or "no?" as the case demanded; but by now she had added quite a few French words to her vocabulary and had grown so all-round proficient that at times she almost convinced herself that she was really of French extraction!

Anyhow, Marie found the whole outing and everything pertaining to it a complete wash-out.

In his rambles with Hayes, Hiram J. asked many questions of the former about Weston and his work. For that young man had commenced to interest him considerably. And Hayes obligingly related choice incidents from the sergeant's not uneventful past. Hiram J. was, however, frankly sceptical about the authenticity of some of these stories. To him Weston appeared so quiet, conventional and even gentle in his ways, that he could not quite visualize him in the parts of dare-devil rough-neck which Hayes allotted to him in the various dramas he unfolded. And on one occasion he voiced his scepticism to Hayes.

"Wess gentle?" repeated Hayes with a grin. "Well, you wouldn't o' thought so if you'd seen him in action. Mind you, he ain't one of them guys what goes huntin' for trouble. He goes out of his way to keep things peaceful-like, if he can. But if trouble comes his way, he ain't exactly bashful. He's all there, believe me! when he first gets started. I've seen him on his lonesome wade into a whole bunch of ugly bohunks, what didn't see eye to eye with him in the matter of a rumpus; but, take it from me, they sure did by the time Wess was through with 'em. Oh, boy!" a fierce enthusiasm crept into his voice, "it's sure a grand an' glorious sight to see Wess cut loose! There ain't no flies on him, lemme tell you!"

"I really can't believe that Weston is so much of a savage," persisted Hiram J.

Hayes pondered for a bit.

"By savage, do you mean rough-neck?" he inquired.

"Well, you may put it that way, I suppose," answered Hiram J., having given the matter due consideration.

"Then you are quite off the rails!" averred Hayes

firmly. "Gosh, Wess ain't no rough-neck. Not usually, that is. He wouldn't hurt a fly, Wess wouldn't, if the fly would behave. But you see, we are a rough bunch up here," he explained candidly, "an' I guess rough stuff is the only stuff that gets acrost, if you want to handle the bunch. You can't handle 'em with no kid-gloves. The only way is to put the fear of God into them, an' Wess is the boy to do it. Anybody who's pulled off a mean stunt, feels considerably uneasy if he knows that Wess is on to him. There ain't much gentleness about him when he bucks up against ornariness an' meanness. He is a regular wild-cat, he is, when he gets goin' good; an' the tougher the proposition is he gets mixed up in, the better he likes it!"

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it," commented Hiram J., as he turned his attention to a fish, which had investigated, more closely than was safe, the troll, which was trailing behind the canoe in which the two were seated. "I always thought he looked too meek and mild for a man who'd wade into trouble and enjoy it."

"Other people have thought the same about old Wess," grinned Hayes. "But they soon found out their mistake, to their sorrer."

"I'd like to see him in action some day," remarked Hiram J., as he was unhooking his catch. "If what you say is true, it must be worth while watching."

"Well, I guess it would be some little eye-opener. But you won't get a chancet," said Hayes, manly regret in his voice. "There ain't nothin' up here for Wess to get busy on." And there was a certain wistfulness in his eyes as they swept the lake, as if he was half hoping that something would reveal itself that would give the lie to his last statement. But the quiet, smiling lake only seemed to endorse his words, and he withdrew his glance with a regretful sigh.

A few days later a hunting party to Grassy Hills was organized. The party consisted of Hiram J., Miss Morgan, Weston, Jim Hayes, Angus and three half-breeds. They set out in three canoes. One was piloted by Hayes and a half-breed and had Hiram J.

as a passenger, another by Weston and Angus with Miss Morgan as passenger, and the third canoe, which was piloted by the two other half-breeds, accommodated the commissariat for the trip.

As they neared the mouth of Grassy Hill River, Jim Hayes pointed out to Hiram J. the spot where Weston had boarded his daughter's canoe from his own; and Hiram J. shuddered. He did not feel too comfortable in the boiling current as it was, with two experts handling his canoe; and as for jumping from one canoe to another . . . The mere thought made him feel dizzy, and almost caused him to break out in a cold sweat.

In the valleys and on the slopes of the Grassy Hills the conifers have given way to foliage-bearing trees, and broad meadows covered with coarse but juicy grass. And these meadows form the pastures for numerous herds of jumping-deer. Down by the river, at the foot of the hills, the hunting party pitched their camp; and extensive preparations were made for an energetic campaign against the unsuspecting deer. It was agreed, as a matter of course, that Hiram J. and his daughter were to do the actual shooting; while Hayes and Weston were to act as guides and reserves, and were further to whisper sage counsel and advice into the ears of the two principals. Angus was to act as general scout, and two half-breeds were to follow the party to carry back the spoil of war.

Bright and early on their first morning they set out to penetrate into the hills. After about an hour's tramp they were met by Angus, who informed them that there was a herd grazing on the other side of a hill which was then facing them. Immense excitement, especially on the part of Hiram J., who had never before in his life shot anything bigger than a rabbit! He made a movement as if he wanted to make a dash for the hill; but he was brought up short by Hayes' hand on his arm.

"Whoa, there!" whispered Hayes softly. "You don't think you can shoot deers that-a-way! You have to go easy and more'n that. How's the wind, Angus?"

"Good," answered Angus.

"Well, now, listen here. You'll have to move up to that hill as careful an' quiet as a guy what's beatin' it from a rest'rant without payin' his bill. When you get to the crest, you'll have to wriggle forward on your stomachs till you get a squint at them deers. Then you lie quite still an' don't breathe more'n you can help. I'll point out to you, Mr. Morgan, the most likely deer to fire at; an' Weston'll do the same for your daughter. All understood?"

Hiram J., who was quivering like a dog held back on a leash, nodded briefly. He was immensely excited and eager to get into action. His daughter signified by a graceful inclination of her head that she had also understood the instructions. Even in this exciting situation she managed to retain her serene, unruffled pose.

The party moved slowly and carefully forward, and all went well. When they had at last wriggled into positions amongst the trees at the crest of the hill, they looked down a gentle slope towards a fairly wide valley, through which a small brook meandered its way. Birches and poplars grew scattered on the grass-covered slope and in the valley, and the green grass at the foot of the hill was dotted with the tan and white shapes of the scattered, peacefully-grazing deer. One buck was grazing away from the main herd, some way up the slope; and it stood out in plain sight not a hundred yards in front of the hunters. This buck was pointed out both by Weston and Hayes to their respective principal as the prospective victim. Hiram J. and daughter then raised their rifles to their shoulders, took careful aim—and let fly; Hiram J. leading by a short neck.

The result of the shots was instantaneous. The deer were galvanized into immediate action before the echoes of the reports had died away, and, with those jerky jumps which have given them their name, they bounced madly up the valley in wild flight. The buck had made one wild jump, when a third shot rang out. It seemed to crumple up in mid-air, crashed heavily to earth, and lay shivering spasmodically for a few

moments before it straightened out and became still and rigid.

"I got him! I got him!" shouted Hiram J., jumping up and rushing forward triumphantly; brandishing his rifle.

The others followed him more soberly to where he stood contemplating the fallen buck with the air of a conqueror.

"Fine shot of mine, daughter. Eh?" he remarked in a slightly patronizing voice, beaming on the party.

"I am not so sure that it was not I who shot it," countered his daughter.

"Eh? What's that? But you didn't shoot at the same deer as I did, did you?" inquired Hiram J. a little taken aback.

"Yes, I did. This was the buck that Mr. Weston pointed out to me, and it was certainly the deer I fired at."

Jim Hayes, who had listened with amusement to the colloquy between father and daughter, now bent down and examined the fallen buck.

"There is only one bullet gone into this critter," he pronounced. "An' I guess it'll be hard to decide which gun that bullet came out of."

But now the sergeant, who considered it only right and proper to stick up for his pupil, chimed in:

"I am afraid I must support Miss Morgan's claim," he said seriously. "I was watching very closely, and I distinctly saw her bullet strike."

"Saw the bullet strike? That is impossible!" asserted Hiram J., his voice registering a mixture of annoyance, disappointment and frank incredulity.

"It is not at all impossible," averred the sergeant. "It is easy to see a bullet strike if you train your eye to it. Isn't that so, Jim?" he appealed to Hayes.

"Sure!" agreed that faithful disciple of George Washington with his best poker face.

But at this point Angus—who had been an interested and keen observer of the incidents surrounding the assault and battery on the buck, and who, moreover, suffered from an often embarrassing defect of being

strongly addicted to the use of terminalogical exactitudes—caused a diversion.

"Sergeant shoot buck. Dam' fine shot," he declared shortly and truthfully. For the sergeant had seen from the actions of the buck that the shots from Hiram J. and his daughter had both been misses; and he had therefore fired that third shot, which had killed the buck, just as the latter was going to depart with the rest of the herd.

"What is that? You didn't shoot, Sergeant, did you?" exclaimed Hiram J., bewildered; and his daughter turned questioning eyes on the sergeant. In the excitement of the moment neither of them had noticed that three shots had been fired.

"Well, I did send a shot after the herd at haphazard," admitted the sergeant, staring coldly at Angus, "but my shot did not get anywhere near this buck," he lied stoutly. "As I said before, the honour is Miss Morgan's."

Hiram J. stared for a few moments at Weston, dark suspicion in his gaze; but Weston did not reveal by a quivering eyelash, even, that he had a burdened conscience.

"Well, daughter," said Hiram J. at last, disappointed, disgusted and only half convinced, "I suppose the first trick is yours. Anyhow," he continued more cordially, "you have my heartiest congratulations on your first buck."

They did not get within active range of any more deer that day. Sound travels far in that country of silence; and their shots had startled the deer all over the hills and made them so wary and suspicious that it was impossible to get anywhere near them, in spite of the strictest caution being observed by the hunters. But early on the following morning they set out again, and then success attended Hiram J. He actually shot a deer! And under circumstances which precluded any doubts.

He and Hayes had, somehow, become separated from the rest of the party for the moment, and, as they advanced through a clump of trees, they discovered an unsuspecting buck, grazing in a glade,

not more than fifty yards in front of them. Quickly Hiram J. raised his gun and fired. The buck made a half-jump into the air, came down stiffly on all four legs, stood for a while swaying; but then gradually its legs began to give way, and it sank down into a kneeling position, rolled slowly over on its side, and lay still.

Hiram J. was jubilant.

"Some shot, eh, Hayes? No doubt as to whose bullet Weston would have seen strike that time!" he shouted triumphantly. And as they approached the fallen animal he commenced to edit in his head the story he was going to tell to his cronies in his club, when he got back to New York. By the time they had reached the dead buck his fertile brain had developed the story up to the point where he takes a snapshot at two hundrd and fifty yards at a galloping deer, and kills it outright!

No more deer were shot that day, and on the following morning the proud hunters returned to Clear Water Lake.

As they were tramping across a ridge on their way back to their temporary camp on the last afternoon of their stay in the Grassy Hills, Angus had touched the sergeant on the arm, and had pointed out to him a vague, light haze—almost indiscernible to the naked eye—which was hovering over some hills several miles to the north.

"Forest fire?" had Weston inquired somewhat anxiously.

"No, camp. Saw same smoke, same place, yesterday," answered Angus conversationally.

"I wonder who can be camping up there?" mused Weston idly. "Must be some prospectors, I suppose." And with that plausible explanation he lost all further interest in the incident; and had forgotten it long before they had reached camp.

## CHAPTER VII

Grassy Hill River has its source in a lake somewhere up in the neighbourhood of the Barrens.

It meanders slowly in and out between the spruce-clad hills towards the south, till it at one point makes a sudden dash towards the west, as if it had made up its mind to end its career in the waters of Clear Water Lake. However, some miles before it reaches the lake it seems to have changed its mind, for it turns abruptly towards the south-east, skirts Grassy Hills, and eventually empties itself into the Gulch River.

It is an unusually smoothly-flowing river for that part of the country, and almost free from any serious rapids.

Its original Indian name was very cumbersome and almost unpronounceable for any white man, so gradually it became known simply as Grassy Hill River.

From the point where the river definitely has decided to spurn an intimate acquaintance with Clear Water Lake, a portage has been cut through the timber to the lake. Though it is hardly literally correct to call it a portage. It is really a part of the winter-trail which comes up Clear Water Lake and which follows Grassy Hill River up to the numerous trapping grounds along that river. Very few people, if any, use this portage outside of the trapping seasons; and the same applies to Grassy Hill River, as this does not touch any of the Reserves or trading posts of the North.

A couple of miles up the river, above the river end of the portage, a tributary flows into the Grassy Hill River from the east. For the last mile before it joins the larger river this tributary broadens to what is almost a bay between the hills that rear up on each side of it.

Some way up this bay a little brook comes happily gurgling and babbling down a slope on the north side. If one follows this brook up the hill-side, one first gets to a narrow rift in the hills from which the brook emerges. If one passes through this defile one finds oneself in a basin, which is screened on all sides by spruce-covered hills. The basin itself is fairly wide, and its level floor is smooth and grass-covered. On the opposite side to the entrance the brook comes hurling down the hill-side like a minor cascade, and splashes into a little lake which has formed at the bottom.

In this pleasant basin a camp had been erected. In amongst the spruces on one side of the basin were three tents. Two stood side by side in front, and the third tent stood some distance behind.

The two foremost tents were occupied respectively, one by Messrs. Joe and Slippery, and one by their two half-breed guides. The third tent was earmarked as the prospective abode of Miss Morgan.

The camp-site had been well chosen, and suited to perfection the retiring habits of Joe and Slippery. Their two guides had pointed out this place to them when they had been informed by their worthy patrons that those gentlemen wanted to lead an unostentatious existence somewhere in the neighbourhood of Clear Water Lake; though with the further stipulation that a reasonable number of miles and an easy, but track-proof, trail must lie between camp and lake.

Slippery and Joe had subjected the site to a close scrutiny from every point of the surrounding country, and had finally decided that the basin would do admirably. Any camp there would be completely screened from the gaze of even the keenest eyes. And when the trail to Clear Water Lake was pointed out to them, and they found that it was twice broken by running water, the worthy couple unanimously agreed that the location was "Jake"!

But they had completely overlooked one important factor: the heat from their camp-fire.

True, they had given the matter due consideration, as they thought. They had issued strict orders that

only perfectly dry wood was to be used for the fires. Having issued this fiat they considered the contingency of the smoke from their fires revealing their whereabouts reduced to nil; as they had always understood that dry wood emits no smoke.

But, as they were no woodsmen, there was one peculiar fact in regard to camp-fires of which they were in ignorance. Often, especially in the afternoons, a cool current of air will stream over the tree-tops in the forests, and when the heat from a fire down in the timbers meets this cooler current of air, the heated air will condense, and will hover like a fine haze directly over the site of the fire. This haze, if seen from above, can be seen for quite some distance—white as it stands out against the dark green of the forest—and to the practised, keen eyes of those whose lives are being spent in the lonely places of the North this haze is a sign which is read unerringly. As we know, the camp of Joe and Slippery had already been spotted by the lynx-eyed Angus from Grassy Hills.

But of this fly in the ointment Messrs. Joe and Slippery were in blissful ignorance.

Their guides could have enlightened them; but probably they did not think the matter of sufficient practical importance to bring to the notice of their employers, and, besides, they were both intensely peeved, and not at all disposed to volunteer information.

They had, so far, not been taken into the confidence of their patrons as to the actual aim and object of the expedition; and there was a certain odour about the whole enterprise which was unpleasant to their Indian noses. There was this mysterious, unoccupied third tent, furnished with what was to them the acme of luxury; and then there were the even more mysterious movements of the two bosses. Every morning, when the day was still in its infancy, the two gentlemen would leave camp, taking with them ample provisions for a long day's outing; and every night they would return late, snappy and disagreeable. And not only had they not once invited any of their guides to accompany them, but they had even issued strict

orders that they were not to be followed and, furthermore, that under no circumstances were the guides to show themselves at Clear Water Lake. And all this secrecy annoyed the two breeds intensely. They were perfectly well aware by this time, that there was something bigger on the cards than mere claim-jumping; and between them they had made a pretty near guess as to the true state of affairs. And they both agreed that it was dirty business!

They were not exactly bothered by moral scruples. They would cheerfully have aided and abetted in any piece of devilry, provided the pay was adequate. But it was this being left out in the cold, playing a kind of walking-on part, which hurt. And they jointly and collectively decided to let Messrs. Joe and Slippery paddle their own canoe, and do their own dirty work!

So one bright and early morning Slippery and Joe were padding disconsolately across the portage on their way to Clear Water Lake. Between them they carried their canoe, right side up, their paddles and provisions deposited in the bottom. One was grabbing the stern and the other the bow; and their progress was more reminiscent of a funeral procession than that of two brisk men of affairs, bent on important business.

The sun was still so low on the north-eastern horizon that its rays only caught the tops of the tall spruces which lined each side of the trail, while on the trail itself reigned a half twilight. The air still retained that chill, dreary morning dampness; and this fact did not tend to sweeten the two gentlemen's already soured dispositions.

Presently they dropped the canoe on the trail.

"——!" said Joe.

"——!" said Slippery, who, in the matter of abusive invectives, never left anything to the imagination of the audience. His vocabulary had even evoked admiration and respect at certain social gatherings of the elect from the New York "Tenderloin."

For a few moments the two gentlemen glared with keen distaste, and even vindictiveness, at the

inoffensive canoe; then they seated themselves at the side of the trail and lit a cigarette each.

"What a life!" sighed Slippery.

"You said it!" agreed Joe gloomily.

"I told you from the beginning that this skirt-business wasn't going to be no cinch," continued Slippery, watching the smoke from his cigarette curl upwards towards the strip of pale-blue morning sky which showed between the tops of the spruces. "Here we have been holed up in these —— backwoods for nearly a month; been running our feet off on this —— portage; been paddling that —— canoe till me hands feel like emery-paper inside; an' for what? That skirt is as far off now as when we first came. We ain't ever got nearer to her than admiring her from afar. And we have to keep on ducking and hiding in the bush like two —— rabbits, so that they won't get a line on us. Gosh! A thousand smackers can be bought too dearly!"

"True, true!" admitted Joe with a sorrowful shake of his head. "It sure is a tougher proposition than I bargained for! But who would-o'-thought that this Hiram J. Morgan fellow would surround himself with a bunch of guys as big as a Tammany Hall meeting? That guy ain't no sport bringing a bunch like that along just to go for a picnic! And then there is that long-legged guy, what seems to have frozen on to the girl. Gosh! You would-o'-thought she would have got tired of him by this time and wanted to strike out on her lonesome now an' then; but no such luck! It ain't hardly decent the way they are always hanging around each other!" he ended, virtuously and lugubriously.

"It seems to me, the only thing to do to get at the skirt is to fix that guy's clock for him," suggested Slippery thoughtfully.

"Aw, talk sense, Slippery!" rejoined Joe with some asperity. "How are you going to get him? Sneak up on him and bust him one, grab the girl, and cheese it? And what about them guns they's always toting along? That guy don't look like no sleep-walker, and if he sees us first, when we are sneaking

up to him—oh, mama! And even if we manage to bust him one; what do you think that girl would be doing while we was doing the bustin'? Lemme tell you, Slippery, that girl doesn't look as if she would think twice about using that there gun of hers; and that gun has got two barrels, and each barrel holds enough shot to make my ol' man's son look like a sieve if they hit me; an' that's a sight that wouldn't appeal to me, lemme tell you! An' as for bumping off that interferin', long-legged —— of a guy with our own artillery—well, I tell you straight; I ain't goin' to be mixed up in no killing; not for only a thousand cart-wheels, that is," he qualified his statement. "No, sir! We have to get that girl alone; an' God knows when that'll be," he ended with a sigh as he lit another cigarette.

"An' in the meantime we are stuck in this hell of a place," broke in Slippery bitterly; taking up the sad tale of their woes and tribulations. "No proper meals—not what I'll call a square meal, anyhow; whisky nearly given out; no proper sleep; and holed up in them hills like rabbits! It sure is fierce. Not a picture-palace, nor a pub, nor nothin' but trees an' boids. Gosh, an' the base-ball season in full swing in li'l ol' Noo York! It seems so long since I saw a ball game that I can't hardly remember what it feels like to heave a pop-bottle at an umpire. Can't you just see the ol' Polo Ground with Matty winding up in the box, an' Ty Cobb facin' him at the plate? And all the boys in the bleachers shoutin' themselves hoarse tryin' to get their goat! Gosh, it sure makes a fellow feel homesick!" And an expression of intense wistfulness crept over his already cloudy features.

"Aw! Have a heart, Slippery, an' can all that stuff!" pleaded Joe. The sunny optimism with which he had started out on the venture was by now a thing of the past. "Things is bad enough as they are without airing all the might-o'-beens. It's worse than being in jail up here. They give you concerts an' shows in Sing-Sing, occasionally; an' the ball-team was shaping fine this year. I was the manager," he added modestly. "I don't know though," he con-

tinued reflectively. "We had some tough luck in that team. We had a regular top-notcher of a pitcher, an' he got mixed up in a row an' killed a warder; an' when I left I heard he was slated for the chair. So what with losing their star pitcher, an' me quittin' the management, perhaps the team has kind of gone on the rocks. It beats me, though, how they have the crust to send to the chair one of the finest pitchers what ever showed a pill across a plate. It doesn't seem fair!" he concluded with an injured air.

"It sure is a raw deal!" agreed Slippery sadly. "But they's liable to do anything these days!" And for a few moments the two worthies smoked in silence, while they brooded over the deplorable fact that so richly strewn with snares and pitfalls is this weary world, that even true genius is not immune from getting entangled.

Joe at last broke the silence, which was getting slightly oppressive owing to the sad thoughts which permeated the brains of each.

"Well, sitting here won't buy baby a new frock, or pay for the one it has got on," he quoth. "So let's pick up that dam' ocean liner of ours, an' get a move on!"

Arrived at Clear Water Lake they launched their canoe, and commenced to paddle down along the eastern shore, closely hugging the shadows.

The surface of the lake was almost as smooth as a sheet of glass. Only in some few places was the placid water ruffled into dark ripples from time to time, by occasional puffs of gentle breeze. The eastern shore was still in shadows, while the opposite shore lay bathed in sunlight; the spruces on the ridges standing out as if they were sprinkled with gold dust. And the still, calm lake faithfully mirrored a topsy-turvy replica of the picture.

Far up in the north end a loon sent out her long-drawn-out, eerie calls for her mate, while in a bay near at hand a flock of wild ducks could be heard discussing the prospects for the coming day.

The whole was a picture of serene peace and beauty, a scene which ought to have struck a chord in any-

body, be his disposition ever so jaundiced; but sad to relate, it left Joe and Slippery utterly and entirely cold! I am afraid that their ideal of beautiful scenery would have been the vista which opens up when one pushes back the swinging doors of a well set up bar-room; or perhaps a base-ball park, with bases full, and the bleachers representing a fair imitation of Bedlam.

Anyhow, they propelled their canoe along with the absolute minimum of exertion which would give it a forward motion. Their objective was a promontory sticking out in the lake some two miles to the north of Camp Morgan. From the highest point of this promontory they had an excellent view of all that was going on at the camp; and they had, therefore, established their base of operations there from the first day that they had honoured the camp with their close surveillance.

Here they used to hide their canoe and themselves in the brush; and one kept watch on all the movements in the camp from the highest point through a pair of field-glasses, while the other slept, or took his ease. It will thus be seen that Slippery's heart-broken complaint about lack of sleep was founded more on an exaggerated sense of all round martyrdom, than on actual facts.

The sad fact has been already mooted, however, that in spite of their closest application to duty, the result of their efforts had so far been, in the fullest sense of the idiom, a wash-out! And they had commenced seriously to voice the opinion that "Schinky had slipped something dirty acrost!"

On this morning as they crossed the mouth of a small bay, they suddenly stopped paddling, and sat gazing pop-eyed at the shore. Then Slippery, who was paddling bow, turned around and stared at Joe, and Joe stared back at Slippery, their faces expressing a happy mixture of awed amaze, incredulity and joy. Then, without a word, they both again turned their gaze towards the shore, half afraid that what they had thought their eyes had seen might still prove to have been a mirage only. But their eyes reassured

them. And what they actually beheld made Slippery see the road leading to that Mecca of the base-ball fan, the New York Polo Ground, stretch before him in straight, unbroken smoothness!

## CHAPTER VIII

Morning had arrived at Camp Morgan, and the inmates had commenced to bestir themselves.

Several of the half-breeds had set out in canoes to lift the fish-nets. The Morgans were all very fond of fresh trout and sturgeon for breakfast; and, as they did not want to rely implicitly on the individual talent of the various members of the party for their morning supply of fish, several nets were set each night.

In his cook-shack Ben Giddy was singing over his preparations for breakfast. His vocal chords proclaimed to all and sundry that he earnestly desired to be in "Dixie"; and those who happened to overhear his harmonious efforts as earnestly wished that his desire might be speedily fulfilled.

To him entered Marie.

"Hello, Fuzzy-Wuzzy!" was Ben's cheery greeting. "Up already? An' how are all the folks at home?"

"Good morning," was Marie's dignified and frigid answer. Ben was not a favourite. Apart from his inane allusions to her curly hair on all occasions, he also had an irksome habit of calling her "Irish." If he had called her "Frenchy," now . . . However, Marie had her duties to fulfil.

"Is the water hot, yes?" she inquired shortly.

"Hello! Got out of bed on the wrong side again this mornin', Irish?" asked the unabashed Ben. "Why don't you put up a sign on the right side with 'This way for a sunny, bright-eyed girl' written on it?"

Marie disdained an answer. She felt that only by resorting to the flowery language of Erin could she decisively squelch the flippant one; and she did not consider the occasion important enough to warrant such a radical transgression from her adopted linguistic platform.

So in silence she proceeded to the cooking range. In further silence she tested the temperature of the water in the big boiler. In continued silence she commenced filling the cans with hot water; while Ben Giddy once more broke out in his hymns of praise, only that by now he had thrown over "Dixie" and had adopted "A Farm in Michigan" as the promised land.

Marie, her task finished, and carrying the hot-water cans in her hands, left the cook-shack with a sharp toss of her head and a withering glance at Ben. Ben, however, was so busily employed preparing dough for soda-biscuits that these signs of acute feminine disapproval were entirely wasted.

Marie first proceeded to the tent occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan. After a perfunctory knock on the canvas tent-flap—an utterly futile matter of form—she started calling the inhabitants by chanting: "Madame, Monsieur!" "Monsieur, Madame!" in a rising crescendo. After a while she was rewarded by hearing Hiram J.'s snores end in a kind of a death-rattle, and this was followed by the mystic query: "Whassit?"

"Hot water for madame and monsieur."

"A' right! Put it inside."

This duty successfully discharged, Marie proceeded to the tent occupied by Miss Morgan; where she went through the same ceremonial, only that the libretto of her chant was now changed to "Mammeselle!"

Usually the ceremony here was shorter than that in front of the tent occupied by Morgan Mere and Pere; but on this morning Marie exerted herself to the point of breathlessness without arousing an answer.

Puzzled, she at last parted the tent-flaps and stuck

her head inside, and to her surprise she found the tent empty.

Bewildered, she withdrew her head and looked searchingly around her; expecting to see the missing lady somewhere on the sky-line. But her eyes drew a blank.

She at once divulged her stupendous news—for Miss Morgan was famed for her antipathy to early rising—to Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, who had just emerged from their tent in dressing-gowns, on their way for their morning dip.

"What is that? Marion not in her tent?" inquired Hiram J., stifling a yawn. "Oh, well, she's around somewhere," he ended indifferently.

"Take a look around for her, Marie, and tell her we have gone ahead to the bay," said Mrs. Morgan with equal indifference.

Marie scouted around in the likely places where Miss Morgan might be found; but without success. In the course of her wanderings she ran into Jim Hayes, and asked him if he had seen Miss Morgan anywhere.

"Gosh! Is that kid missin' again!" remarked Hayes, disgust in his voice. "I guess I'll have to tie a string to that young female to keep track of her. Has she gone on the lake?"

"How am I to know?" inquired Marie ungraciously and tartly, outraged at the free and easy terms Hayes employed when alluding to "Mammeselle."

"Sure, that's easy," grinned Hayes, who loved teasing Marie—or Mary as he would persist in calling her, in spite of her indignant corrections. "All you've got to do is either to open them sweet little blinkers of yourn an' let them roam over the canoes, or else open that little rosebud of a mouth of yourn an' ask one of the boys if her canoe is missin'. Simple, ain't it, when you know how?"

Marie bridled under these insults, and was about to give a sharp answer; but Hayes had turned away from her, and was shouting a query in Cree to one of the breeds, who was coming from the bay with a load of fish, bound for the cook-shack. The breed shouted

an answer in the same language, and Hayes turned to the girl again:

"Say, Mary, my dear. Your little lamb is on the lake all right. Her canoe is gone."

The outraged Marie left him without vouchsafing an answer, and went to report the result of her quest to Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, who were just returning from their dip.

"Well, well!" remarked Hiram J. with an indulgent smile to his wife as they continued to their tent to dress. "What do you think of that, mother? Fancy daughter getting up with the birds to get some morning exercise! She is certainly perking up. I'll bet she'll be back at breakfast-time good and hungry!"

But breakfast-time came, and no Miss Morgan. Her parents commenced to feel slightly uneasy, and Hiram J. sent for Jim Hayes.

"Look here, Jim," he said. "We are getting a bit worried about my daughter. She seems to have been away a long time Do you know, by any chance, when she started out?"

"I couldn't say for sure; but it must have been considerably early, 'cause none of the boys saw her leave. I've questioned them all. I gather she must have slipped away before any of them was about, or else somebody would have been sure to spot her."

"What time do the boys get up, then?"

"Oh, somewheres between five an' half-past."

Hiram J. looked at his watch.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed with some alarm. "It is now nearly half-past eight. If you are right in your surmises, she must have been gone more than three hours. What on earth can have been keeping her all this time?"

"Well, this is how I figger," said Jim Hayes. "Early this mornin' I heard some shootin' across the lake. That would be Weston an' Angus tryin' for ducks. Now, Miss Morgan has probably spotted them an' joined them; and then, seein' it would be a long way back to camp, she's probably gone an' had breakfast at Weston's camp."

"Of course! That is probably what has happened," said Hiram J., relieved. "Anyhow, Jim, I wish you would be kind enough to run over to Weston's camp and bring her home. Her mother is getting a bit anxious."

"Sure, I'll run over," answered Jim heartily. "I'll set out straight away; an' we'll be back in about half an hour or so. Don't you or Mrs. Morgan worry none. Your daughter can handle a canoe most as well as any old-timer by this time. An' it is a nice, calm day, so she's bound to be all right."

As Hayes turned away to depart he muttered to himself:

"Well ain't these women an eternal source o' trouble, now? An' these high-toned serciety-women is absolutely the dog-gone limit! Coddled too much, an' ain't disciplined right, I reckon." And he shook his head sadly as he strode down to his canoe.

After Hayes had taken his departure, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan sat down to their breakfast in the living-tent, the canvas front of which had been rolled up to give the occupants an uninterrupted view towards the lake.

The meal was not a success. They each tried to impress on the other that of course there was no need to worry; and only succeeded in alarming each other the more. Their eyes would constantly stray surreptitiously towards the lake; and never before had Ben Giddy's culinary efforts met with such scant appreciation.

At last they saw two dots far out on the lake, which materialized into two canoes as they came nearer.

"Here they come, mother!" announced Hiram J. breezily; but his voice shook a little.

He walked over to where a pair of prismatic glasses were hanging on a peg on one of the tent-poles; and, taking the glasses out of the case, he raised them to his eyes. He studied the canoes steadily for a while; then he lowered the glasses, polished the lenses with his pocket handkerchief, and again focused them on the rapidly travelling canoes.

"Do you see her?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Morgan.

"I can't get these glasses focused properly," answered her husband in a voice which he tried to make casual. "There is such a glare from the lake; so everything gets blurred. But let us walk down to the jetty and receive them."

They went down to the bay. But in spite of the cheerful front which Hiram J. exhibited for his wife's benefit, his heart was heavy. For the glasses had functioned exceedingly well, and to his consternation he had discovered that the occupants of the canoes were respectively Hayes in the one and Weston and Angus in the other.

At last the canoes rounded the point into the bay, and approached the landing.

Mrs. Morgan's eyes opened wide, and she clutched her husband's arm.

"She is not with them," she whispered in a tremulous voice.

"Keep cool, mother," encouraged Mr. Morgan, patting the trembling hand which was clutching his coat-sleeve; and making a strong effort to keep the tremor out of his own voice. "It doesn't follow that anything is wrong because she wasn't over at the sergeant's camp. That was only a suggestion. We'll wait and hear what Weston and Hayes have got to say."

But Mrs. Morgan did not answer. She studied the approaching canoes with something akin to terror in her eyes.

At last the canoes scraped alongside the jetty, and the sergeant greeted the Morgans with breezy cheerfulness which he was far from feeling.

"Good morning, Mrs. Morgan! Good morning, Mr. Morgan! I hear Miss Morgan is playing truant. Has she returned yet?"

Mr. and Mrs. Morgan merely shook their heads in dumb misery.

"Well, there is really not the slightest cause for worry. Miss Morgan is extremely capable in handling a canoe, and the lake has been like a

duck-pond all the morning," continued the sergeant reassuringly.

"But accidents will happen," interpolated Mr. Morgan lugubriously.

"Not on a day like this. And besides . . ." But here the sergeant abruptly checked himself. He was going to point out to them that Miss Morgan was an excellent swimmer; but as the statement might indicate that he did not consider an accident outside the realm of probabilities, he desisted. "Besides," he continued on another tack, "Miss Morgan was up so early this morning that it is more than likely that she has fallen asleep somewhere while resting. And her canoe may have gone adrift and left her marooned somewhere; perhaps on one of the islands. Anything like that could have happened, so there is not the slightest cause for alarm. Anyhow, we'll organize a search-party at once; and we shall soon have your daughter back—hale and sound," he ended with an encouraging smile.

After a short conference between Weston and Hayes, one canoe was dispatched across to the western shore with orders to search every bay carefully; another was sent to examine all the islands; Jim Hayes was going to search the south end of the lake; and Weston and Angus took the eastern shore. The canoes of the search parties rapidly left the bay, and paddled out on the lake, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Morgan in a slightly more optimistic mood, as Weston's sanguine assurances had impressed them not a little.

But it was fortunate for their peace of mind that they had not overheard Weston's parting injunctions to Jim Hayes.

"Look here, Jim," he had said gravely. "You had better scout down as far as below the rapids. You can never tell. Miss Morgan may have imagined herself such an accomplished canoeist by now that she might have thought it about time for her to try issue with the Gulch."

"You said it, Wess! The same thought has occurred to me also," had Hayes answered, equally

serious. "You never can guess what the hell a young woman may be up to."

Weston and Angus pushed rapidly northward, following the shore closely, and entering every bay, while their eyes were dodging keenly around everywhere.

It was Angus's sharp eyes which first discovered a dark something floating out on the lake. As they rapidly paddled towards the object they soon discovered it to be the bottom of an overturned canoe. They had no optimistic delusions about the ownership of the canoe, and a closer look proved their surmises correct. The derelict was without a shadow of a doubt Miss Morgan's canoe.

When they got alongside they quickly righted it, and sat for a few moments staring in silence into the empty, water-logged craft.

After a while Weston, his face very grave, lifted his head, and with his eyes he measured the distance to the nearest point on the shore. The distance was not very long for a good swimmer like Miss Morgan. Probably she was somewhere in the woods, walking back to camp. Perhaps she was near enough for a hail to reach her.

"Hoh, Miss Morgan!" he shouted at the top of his voice. Several times he shouted; but only the mocking echo of his own voice floated back to them from the woods, followed by a chilling silence.

"Perhaps she is so far on her way that she can't hear. She might even be back at camp by now," he remarked hopefully to Angus.

But Angus merely shook his head. He was a keen observer, and had noticed several things.

"I do not think so," he answered in Cree. "The bottom of the canoe is very dry. She must have been floating like this for many hours, so the girl would have had plenty of time to reach camp before we left, if she had been walking back."

And Weston had to admit the force of the argument. He knew that Angus's sight and judgment were thoroughly reliable in such matters. And the conviction began to grow on him that they were facing

grim, stark tragedy. That Miss Morgan, who by now had proved herself quite proficient in handling a canoe, should have had an upset—and especially on a calm morning like this—he found utterly inexplicable. But there was the capsized canoe to prove it. A moment's thoughtless recklessness, or carelessness perhaps—and when she struck the water a possible touch of cramp, and . . .

His further mental reconstruction of the tragedy—the hopeless, agonizing struggle in the water, the inevitable end—struck a chill to his heart, and his face grew strained. He had been face to face with many tragedies in the past; but they had mostly always been impersonal affairs, mere "cases." But this was different; and he grew more and more horrified as his brain gradually commenced to grasp the entire situation in all its grim details.

Worst of all, perhaps, was the thought that soon he would have to apprise of his find and its obvious significance the doting parents who were waiting optimistically back at the camp for their daughter's safe and speedy return. And what the shock would mean to them he dared hardly contemplate. His heart grew heavy within him as he thought of the hideous task before him, and he sat staring down into the water-logged craft alongside, his grim thoughts rioting in his mind.

Suddenly Angus's voice broke in on his meditations.

"What is that, Angus?" he inquired a little dully.

But Angus did not repeat his former remark. Instead he merely pointed down the lake, in the direction from which they had come.

Weston's eyes followed Angus's pointed direction, and they discovered a canoe heading towards them. The frequent flashes of the paddles indicated that they were being swung recklessly from side to side, and that the canoe was travelling at top speed.

"I wonder if . . ." commenced the sergeant; but broke off, as if afraid of putting into words the optimistic thought which had come to him. So in silence he and Angus watched the rapidly approaching canoe.

As it came within hailing distance one of the two half-breeds who occupied it began shouting, showing signs of great excitement almost indecent in one of his phlegmatic and indolent temperament:

"Hey! Sergeant! You come straight back to camp! Boss wants you!"

"Has Miss Morgan returned?" bellowed Weston in return.

"Me not know," answered the breed. The canoes were now within speaking distance, and the conversation could be carried out in a more normal key. "Him boss up on hill. Suddenly we hear great shout. We look. Boss is running down hill wavin' paper in him han', an' shoutin' fit to bust: 'Hey, hey! Fin' sergeant at once, quick!' An' we go off. He also sen' somebody fetch Jim Hayes."

"But what is it all about?" cried Weston impatiently.

"Him boss talk so fast, me not understan' all; but hear him shout: 'Kidnap! Kidnap!' several times. . . ." But here he was rudely interrupted by the sergeant.

"No time for more pow-wow!" he shouted. "I must look into this at once. You two bring this canoe back to camp. Speed her up, Angus! We have to beat all records back."

And they were off in a cloud of spray.

## CHAPTER IX

During half of the preceding night Miss Morgan had been severely worried, annoyed and incommoded by a school of mosquitoes, which in some inexplicable manner had managed to get inside her mosquito-net; and an intense warfare had been the result.

Several times she had decided that at last she had succeeded in routing the enemy. and she had snuggled

down on her pillow again. But on each occasion she had come to the sad conclusion that she had underrated considerably the energy and perseverance of the attacking forces. Every time her eyes had closed, and she was on the point of sliding into dreamland, a chorus of " bizzzz-zizzzz-zizzzz "s in various keys had warned her that another attack was being launched by the intrepid foe; and the fight started all over again.

At last she decided that the time had come for decisive measures! She sprang out on the tent-floor, and commenced a systematic and bloody campaign against the invaders, which were now in the unenviable strategic position of having their retreat cut off. After some fifteen minutes of fierce fighting, no quarter being asked for nor any expected, Miss Morgan at last decided that the foe was successfully accounted for to the last man!

Even during the excitement of the fray she had been vaguely conscious of a weird sound which seemed to have been emanating from a point in the near distance; a sound which had been reminiscent of the bagpipes piping the sturdy hielanders into battle; only that these particular bagpipes seemed to have become inextricably mixed up with the siren of an ocean liner.

Now, when peace once more ruled in her tent, Miss Morgan gave her undivided attention to that mysterious sound; and, as she listened, her two prettily arched eyebrows almost met in a disapproving frown. For the producer of the bagpipe-siren effect was none other than her father, who was snoring deeply and happily in the tent next to hers, which he was sharing with his partner in life.

Miss Morgan was not an unreasonable girl. She realized that even the most fastidious of persons would on occasions relapse into gentle snoring. But what so particularly annoyed her about her father's stertorous performance was, that they were such frankly and unmistakably plebeian snores!

For years, since her father's millions had secured the family a footing in Society, she had energetically striven to eradicate in her sire all traces of an obscure and humble origin; and, as she considered, with con-

siderable success. She was, therefore, pained and scandalized at the realization that there still was clinging to him such remnants of the lower strata as those hearty, but deplorable, snores decidedly indicated. Her frown deepened as she pondered how to cope with this matter; but after several moments of intense and concentrated speculation she, with a shake of her head, regretfully relegated the task to the realm of the impossible.

She prepared to crawl into her bed again; but made the surprising discovery that she was so wide awake that the prospect of further sleep did not appeal to her. She looked at her watch. Half-past four.

She walked over to the tent-flap and stuck her head out. It was a glorious morning. She inhaled deeply the cool, fresh air with its tang of resin, while she admired the calm scene which spread out before her. All the trees, even those on distant ridges across the lake, stood out in clear, sharp relief in the transparent morning light; and by some optical illusion the islands on the lake seemed to hang suspended in the air, some feet above the level of the water. And the smooth, calm lake seemed to smile and wink at her, as if inviting her to come out and play; an invitation which she decided to accept after some moments of thought.

Quickly she dressed herself; and, stepping out of the tent, she quietly made her way to her canoe, her feet making a dark swath in the grey net of dew which covered the grass.

Having launched her canoe she paddled slowly out of the bay; and out on the lake she followed the eastern shore northwards. The canoe seemed to glide smoothly, almost without exertion on her part, through the glassy water; and she watched idly the ripples, which her canoe stirred up, lose themselves far out on the lake.

For some miles she paddled along. At last she decided to have a few minutes' rest before she started on her return trip. She turned her canoe into a small bay, ran it up on the smooth shore, climbed out, and stretched herself on the dry, white sand a bit farther up the beach.

How refreshing is this early morning air, she reflected idly. Of course, she had frequently made acquaintance with the early morning air in the past; but that had generally been on occasions when she was homeward bound from some function or dance; when her eyes were heavy; her feet tingling; and when the echo of dance-music still buzzed around in her head. On those occasions the morning air had appeared chilly and dreary, and had caused her, shudderingly, to draw her cloak closer around her; while her only desire had been to gain, as early as possible, the snug sanctuary of her bed. But this new aspect of the morning air as an agreeable tonic and cordial was new to her.

She wondered if any of her friends would have enjoyed sharing her outing with her? Hardly! She smiled at the thought of the well-bred incredulity and horror they would display, when she told them of her escapade. And she commenced wondering about where her friends all were at the present moment. Some had gone to Europe, she knew; and others had gone to the Adirondacks and similar places. Well, in the fall they would most of them meet at Palm Beach. In her mind's eye she saw the magnificent hotels; the promenade crowded with smartly-dressed people; the yachts in the harbour; and the motor-cars dashing backwards and forwards. She had visions of bathing parades in the latest things in bathing suits: smart, chic; but totally unsuitable for contact with the wet elements. She had further visions of golf, tennis and midnight motoring parties to some road-house, with dancing into the small hours. And she conjured up pictures of brilliant functions at the hotels; of yachting parties with smart, obsequious stewards serving cooling drinks under the white awning on deck, while one leant comfortably back in a deck-chair; and she stirred under an agreeable feeling of anticipation.

And Palm Beach would be followed by the season in New York, when she would again take her triumphant place in the glittering throng of beautifully-gowned ladies and polished, perfectly-behaved

men, who said and did the right things at the right moments, and who were at her beck and call at all times. For since her first entry into New York Society some years previously, her progress had been like a triumphal procession; and the most desirable of the young props of Society could always be found in her train. She smiled a little to herself. The picture of herself in the whirl of Society, with a smart court surrounding her, was one that always pleased and never palled.

Oh, well, this was all something different to roaming around up here in the rude, unrefined wilderness; but, well, it was a change and a new experience, and, of course, father seemed to like it, and it would help whet her appetite for the pleasures to come. But it was certainly monotonous at times, and . . .

At this point in her profound meditations she was interrupted by a splashing sound out on the bay. She lifted her head, and discovered a canoe with two men heading towards her. At first she thought it might be the sergeant and Angus, or some of the men from the camp; but the way the occupants handled their paddles excluded these possibilities. Sergeant Weston had taught her the Indian style of paddling, with the smooth, graceful over-head swing from side to side; and she speedily recognized inexperience in the way the two paddles in the approaching canoe were being hacked jerkily into the water. She sat up to study the newcomers more closely; and as the canoe drew nearer she saw that the occupants were white men, and total strangers to her. As a matter of fact, the strangers were none other than the two members of the Kidnapping Syndicate, Joe and Slippery. It was Miss Morgan, lying on the smooth sand in the bay, whom they had discovered as they crossed the mouth; and it was that vision which had stirred them so strongly.

At last the canoe grated against the beach, and the two men got out. Miss Morgan decided on the spot that she did not like their looks.

Neither Joe nor Slippery was originally cut out for prize-winner in a beauty competition; and their sojourn in the free and easy North had neither improved nor

glossed over the fundamental defects which nature had inflicted on them. Like all those whose faces have become pasty through constant burrowing in big cities, they had been treated unkindly by the sun when she had at last got an unobstructed go at them. Instead of showing a healthy tan, their faces had taken on the rich hue of a California Sunkist orange; and the skin on their noses and ears was perpetually peeling and hanging in tatters; while their lips were cracked and sore. Taken all around, their faces would have given a casual observer the impression that the owners were recovering from severe attacks of scarlet fever.

They did not look as if they felt particularly at ease in the woodsman's garb they affected. Especially did their awkward stumbles when they happened to step on a stone or pebble proclaim that moccasins were not their normal or favourite footgear. Even to Miss Morgan's not particularly practised eye they looked entirely and utterly out of the picture; and she wondered who they were and what they were doing here.

When they got up to where the girl was still sitting on the sand, Slippery, who was in the lead, removed his hat with a flourish, which he fondly hoped would stamp him as a "gent-o'-the-world."

"Good morning, miss," he addressed her pleasantly, with what he intended to be an ingratiating smile; but which Miss Morgan judged a particularly nasty leer.

"How do you do," she answered coldly.

"Say, miss, we've been looking for you some time," continued Slippery after a short pause.

"Indeed? And now, when you have found me, what can I do for you?" she inquired still more frigidly, staring Slippery up and down.

Slippery shuffled his feet uneasily under her scrutiny, and his eyes dropped to the ground. He felt embarrassed, and wondered how to diplomatically state their errand. Skirts always affected him that way! But Joe was made of sterner stuff.

"I'll tell you straight, without no frills, what you can do, miss!" he spoke up. "You can just step

right into that there canoe, which we have just vacated, an' come right along with us to our camp. Dat's what you can do! "

" Along to your camp? " repeated the girl, puzzled. " And why, please? "

" Because I say so! " answered Joe tersely. He was in a hurry lest somebody should turn up and spoil their game, and, consequently, somewhat short-tempered.

" In spite of your abominably rude answer, I still fail to see why I should visit your camp! " retorted Miss Morgan with some heat.

Joe was about to give a sharp answer; but Slippery got in ahead of him.

" Say, I'll explain, miss," he said in a tone which he tried to make propitiatory. " Your dad can't see his way to do a certain thing, and so we's intending to use a bit of gentle third degree persuasion; meaning, keeping you as our guest for a bit, till your dad sees daylight. See? "

" In other words, you intend to kidnap me and hold me for ransom or something? "

" Hit it first shot, miss! " broke in Joe dryly. " But as this ain't a Methodist meeting, we'll turn the tap off on all sociable stuff, and get a move on! Come on, miss! "

" And if I refuse to come with you? "

" Well then, we'll have to tie you up and lug you along anyhow. An' lemme tell you something more. If you start any shouting or other shennanigans we'll tie you up an' gag you too! See? So what's it going to be? Are you coming along without no nonsense, or must we lug you along like a turkey trussed up for thanksgiving? "

" Oh, I will come along peacefully. Do you think for a moment that I would expose myself to the indignity of being contaminated by having your dirty paws touch me? " she flashed back at him with spirit. Whatever her faults, cowardice was not one of them.

Joe's Sunkist features took on a deeper hue; and Slippery, who had listened in silent admiration to Joe's

masterful and forceful handling of the situation, looked down at the sand and started scratching around with the toe of one moccasined foot. Unfortunately he managed to come in contact with a sharp flint, and he abruptly ceased his excavations with a smothered curse.

The Syndicate were not an oversusceptible couple, and the word "contaminate" was an alien to them; but they had caught enough of the drift of the girl's remarks to recognize them for what they were: a nasty crack! And no man, not even a hard-working and unemotional kidnapper, particularly relishes receiving nasty cracks from pretty girls.

"Say, there is such a thing as driving a man too far!" muttered Joe thickly.

"A *man*, yes!" agreed Miss Morgan sweetly.

Joe chewed on this last one for a bit. Although his ears were not very finely attuned to the subtler inflections of the English language, he, nevertheless, had a hazy impression that there was hidden in that remark some not altogether complimentary reflection on himself. But he was not quite sure; so he let it pass, and confined himself to remarking:

"Well, time we was moving along. So shake a leg, miss—if you please!"

While Miss Morgan scrambled to her feet, refusing all offers of assistance, Slippery did some deep and rapid thinking. Their captive did not appear like one of "them helpless, dependent kind of females"; but seemed almost aggressively capable of standing up for herself. And with this realization the first exhilaration of actually having secured their prey began to evaporate in Slippery; and his persistent pessimistic conviction anent the "hoodoo" hovering over any enterprise in which a skirt was involved once more came to the fore. And this caused him to visualize some possible failure in the future with an attendant day of reckoning; and he decided that a conciliatory and deferential attitude towards the girl might help to ameliorate his lot, should Nemesis overtake them. He, therefore, turned to the girl, and said in his most ingratiating voice:

"Look here, miss. Don't you worry over this picnic! We have got a swell camp with a dandy an' elegant tent fixed up for youse. We ain't, of course, in your class; but we's both gents, an' don't intend to hurt you. So you needn't be afraid. See?"

"Afraid?" repeated Miss Morgan in a voice so surcharged with scorn and contempt as to make the Syndicate squirm. "Afraid of a couple of cowardly ruffians, who have to come two strong to capture one lone girl?" And, sad to relate, here Miss Morgan so far forgot her duties towards Society that she relapsed into the vernacular. "You make me smile!" she added with a sneer.

The Syndicate let that one go by; although Slippery mumbled to himself something about it being "fierce to be handed the frozen mitt, when a guy is aiming to do the right thing!"

In silence the party repaired to the canoes, and took their places in the one belonging to the Syndicate. Joe took the stern, Miss Morgan occupied the middle, and Slippery the bow. They placed Miss Morgan's paddle in her canoe, and took the latter in tow.

When they were well out on the lake clear of the bay, Joe hauled the trailing canoe alongside and deliberately capsized it.

"When they find that thing floating bottom up, it'll give them something to think of!" he declared with satisfaction.

"Do you realize that my people will think I am drowned if they find my canoe floating around like that?" inquired Miss Morgan with the first sign of distress she had shown since her meeting with her escort.

"Sure, miss!" answered Joe cheerfully. He felt a certain satisfaction at seeing her squirm, for her earlier sallies against him still rankled. "That's the main idea. See? They'll be so doggone busy hunting for your corpse that they won't have no time snooping around and perhaps catch up with us before we get you safe to camp. When we first get there, we'll sure be so hard to find that they'll be welcome to know we've got you!"

"You cowardly, callous ruffians!" exploded Miss Morgan, nearly upsetting the canoe in her emotion. "Do you really mean to tell me that you are so utterly low and heartless that you deliberately intend to expose my parents to the shock of believing me drowned?"

"Aw, look now, miss! It won't be for long," Slippery—still with one wary eye on that possible Nemesis—tried to pacify her. "As soon as we reach camp, we's going to send a letter to your dad saying as how you are safe and thriving, see? So they will know almost at once that you ain't gone before, as the saying is."

Miss Morgan constrained herself to a dignified silence. She realized that it did not really serve any purpose to try to appeal to the chivalrous instincts of the two abandoned rascals. They simply had none. And she was already half sorry that she had let herself be provoked to her previous outburst. But Joe kept the ball of conversation rolling.

"Say!" he cried. "Nix on all that chin-wagging! We can do all our talking at camp! An' lemme tell you something, miss! Don't you start trying to upset this here canoe again, or we'll sure truss you up good an' proper! I'll just put you wise that both me an' my pal can both swim, so you can't get rid of us by that kind of shennanigans. Now I've warned you!"

As Miss Morgan maintained an aloof silence, Messrs. Joe and Slippery again applied themselves to the paddles, and the canoe glided along towards the portage and the camp in a morning which had lost its glamour to at least one of the party.

They arrived at the camp without any incidents; but the trip had not been marked by any particular cheer and merry comradeship. Miss Morgan had, throughout, maintained an attitude of lofty disdain, and had determinedly ignored and repulsed Slippery's attempts at establishing more friendly relations. And this had in a measure distressed Slippery. He had summed up the situation in a muttered aside to Joe as follows:

"She's treating us more like a coupla skunks with the rabies than as a coupla gents!" Which allegory Joe had received with a contemptuous snort.

When the two members of the Syndicate had at last dropped their canoe in the basin—they invariably kept their two canoes up there—with a relieved sigh and a last vindictive glance at that stout and inoffensive craft, Slippery approached Miss Morgan in his best *preux chevalier* manner.

"Say, miss," he said with friendly deference. "Come along of me, an' I'll show you your tent."

In silence she followed him; and when he had unlaced the flaps of the tent she poked her head inside and glanced around. The furnishings were not bad, though not erring on the side of luxury. At least not according to her standards. There was a camp-cot with blankets and sheets; an upturned packing-case with an enamelled wash-basin and water jug; a mirror; a deck chair; and even a strip of matting on the floor.

Having finished the cursory inspection of her future quarters she withdrew her head and turned to Slippery, who at once addressed her ingratiatingly, a shade of pride in his voice:

"Not bad quarters them, eh, miss?"

"How long are you intending to keep me here?" she queried uncompromisingly; totally ignoring Slippery's friendly question.

"That depends," answered Slippery a little shortly; the girl's attitude had commenced to pique him a bit. But by now Joe had joined them, and he promptly grasped the reins of conversation.

"You'll stay here till we hear from our employer that you can go. See?" he remarked.

"And how long will that be?"

"Well, now, that depends on circumstances," answered Joe reflectively. "We's sending a message to your ol' man straight away; and the rest is up to him. If he acts prompt, according to schedule, it'll only be for a month or so, I'll say."

"A month?" gasped Miss Morgan with a note of dismay pleasing to Joe's ears. He was a man of

vindictive temperament. "But you can't expect me to stay up here for all that time without any clothes!" continued the girl. "I have only got what I am standing up in. Have you thought of that?"

"We sure have, miss," spoke up Slippery with great complacence. His hour of triumph had arrived, and he was about to play his trump card. "We are gents what know what frills an' things a lady is needful of." He went over and opened the tent flap, and, with a triumphant smile, he pointed to a box, standing up against the tent wall. "See that box, miss? You just have a li'l peep inside that, an' you'll find all you want. There is everything in there what you'll need, even to tooth-brush an' tooth-paste. Me an' Joe here took a lot of trouble and thought over that outfit, believe me! Bet you'll find everything O.K.," he ended with satisfied conviction. But Slippery's sunny smile found no reflection on the girl's stern features. Without a word she brushed past him and entered the tent.

Slippery dropped the flap behind her and walked over to Joe, to whom he remarked with a complacent smirk:

"Say, Joe. Won't she open them pretty lamps of hers wide when she has a squint at what's inside of that box. Oh, boy! That'll teach her that we's gents of the world, an' not common rough-necks!"

"I don't give one hoot in hell for what she thinks!" answered Joe sourly and unfeelingly.

At that moment Miss Morgan reappeared, and Slippery immediately observed, with a sinking feeling, that all was far from well. She confronted the two with flashing eyes, a red spot burning on each cheek; and even the most casual observer could hardly have failed to notice that she was in a towering rage. She thrust forward her hands, in each of which she carried an article of feminine wearing apparel which she, in a saner mood, would hardly have exhibited quite so publicly.

"Are these the things you expect me to wear?" she asked with forced, but ominous, calm.

"What's the matter with them?" asked Slippery

unhappily, realizing that his trump card had gone astray, somehow, and had failed to win the trick.

"What is the matter? What is the matter?" mimicked their prisoner. "Do you mean that you seriously expect me to wear things which I should have felt ashamed to send to an orphanage?"

"Aw, come now, miss," pleaded Slippery. "Them things can't be as bad as all that. Say, them is the best things me and Joe could scare up in that one-horse burg, an' . . ."

But here Joe cut in:

"Stow it, Slippery! Stow it!" he directed impatiently. "If she don't like the stuff, she can do the other thing! This ain't no ladies' outfitting shop where she can pick and choose as she likes!"

But here the slender strand, which had kept Miss Morgan's fury in leash, snapped; and she gave her rage a free rein:

"You unspeakable, odious ruffian!" she flung at Joe; and so forcefully that even that hardened individual swayed slightly before the storm. "How dare you speak to me like that! Persons like you are too vile and low to be allowed to live on this earth! Words fail me, when it comes to describing the thing you are, you—you vile, abandoned wretch! Your very presence would poison the purest atmosphere; so please get as far away from me as you can. Although I am your prisoner, I refuse being suffocated by breathing the same air as you!" And having discharged that salvo she turned on her heel and strode furiously into the tent.

The Syndicate, jointly, glared at the innocent tent for a few seconds in outraged silence; then they turned around and started strolling down to the brook.

"Gosh, she is sure some spit-fire. An' she ain't bashful about shooting off her mouth either," muttered Joe after they had walked for some moments in reflective silence.

"You sure got yours, I'll tell the world!" remarked Slippery with ill-concealed malevolent satisfaction.

"I'll tame that vixen yet, see if I don't!" growled

Joe ferociously. " I'll teach that female manners, an' don't you forget it! "

" An' how are you going to set about it? " asked Slippery with frank curiosity, a slightly sarcastic note in his voice.

" I'll manhandle her till she sees daylight, dat's what I'm gonna do! " threatened Joe truculently.

" Say, Joe. You had better get a spanner for that wheel-box of yours. There's a nut loose! " was Slippery's friendly advice.

" What-cha-mean? "

" Aw, use them head-fillings of yours, Joe! You 'member what Schinky told us about treating her "— Slippery jerked his head somewhat viciously towards the tent which was sheltering Miss Morgan—" like a lady, don't you? "

" But Schinky ain't here, is he? An' how the hell is he going to get wise to what I do to her? "

" Say, Joe. What you want is a whole tool-box, an' not only a spanner! " said Slippery dogmatically. " Them wheel-works of yourn is sure in a bad state! Say! Lemme tell you something. If you start any rough-stuff around that girl, old Hiram J. Morgan will raise such a holler when he gets back to Noo York, an' set such a lot o' guys busy trying to find out things, that Schinky won't feel happy. An' that won't please him, believe mu! "

" To hell with Schinky! I ain't afraid of him! " cried Joe valiantly.

" Atta boy! Go to it! " encouraged Slippery jeeringly. " Of course it ain't nothing in your young life if Schinky gets sore an' goes to the District Attorney and tells him a few things about you; things what will make the District Attorney feel like a week of Sundays, and what'll make him sing with joy when he rings the bell for the patrol wagon an' the reserves. Of course not! You'll like to be given the welcoming mitt by your ol' pals the warders at Sing-Sing again, when you go there for a long, cosy stay. Won't you? Talk sense, Joe! " ended Slippery in a less flippant vein. " You can't afford to buck ol' Schinky; an' you know it! "

"Too true, Slippery!" said Joe unhappily after some silent reflections. "But ain't it fierce, being treated like a coon by a bit of a skirt! Gosh! This job is worth all of the thousand smackers; an' then some!"

"You said it! But what did I wise you up to in Schinky's office that day? Didn't I say that mixing up with a skirt wasn't going to be no cinch? Answer me that!" demanded Slippery with not a little complacency at seeing his predictions fall out according to schedule.

"You sure did; and I was a mutt not to listen and be warned," moaned Joe bitterly. "Anyhow," he continued a little more hopefully, "it sure can't be for long. We'll send one of them Injuns of ours off with the letter for Hiram J., curse him, straight off the bat, an' get some quick action!"

But this was evidently not going to prove the Syndicate's lucky day, in spite of its auspicious beginning.

They found their retainers cooking breakfast; but a close observer would have discovered something in their attitude which would indicate that the two had gone into committee, and that serious and weighty problems were on the agenda.

"Say!" commenced Joe without preamble, when they got to where the two breeds were sitting. "One of you guys take this letter," here he produced the sealed and bulky envelope which had been handed to him by Schinkelstein, "and sneak it into the camp of them Yankees over at the lake. But do it so that no one gets wise to where it comes from. You get me? Who's going?"

If Joe had expected that the two breeds were going to fall over each other in their scramble to secure the honour of being messenger, he was doomed to disappointment. The two, Moiese and Bernard, rose slowly to their feet and faced their employers.

"Him white woman, him stay here?" inquired Moiese, pointing to Miss Morgan's tent.

"What the hell has that got to do with you?" elegantly asked Joe. "You's paid to do what

you are told, an' not ask dam' fool questions! Sabbe? "

"Him going to stay?" persisted Moïese unmoved, while Bernard gazed unwaveringly at Joe and Slippery.

For a while Joe looked like a volcano contemplating eruption; but evidently he did not think this the right moment for belching forth brimstone and sulphur, for he confined himself to growling ungraciously:

"She sure is!"

"Then me an' Bernard quit!" was Moiese's startling answer.

Joe and Slippery were utterly taken aback at hearing this bald and unexpected announcement, and, for a few minutes, all they could do was to stare in pop-eyed amazement at their two retainers. Slippery was the first to regain the use of his vocal chords.

"Say! What the hell is bitin' you two?" he cried, his voice nearly reaching the treble in his excitement. "Ain't you bein' paid to sit in with us? So what-cha-mean by this stuff about clearin' out?"

"Me an' Bernard not know you goin' kid—kid—" Moiese groped for the word, "kid-steal him white woman, or me an' Bernard not come. You bet you! God dam' no! You take white woman; bye-an'-bye sergeant come; sergeant take us; an' we go Stony Mountain." (The Manitoba Penitentiary.) "Me an' Bernard not like Stony Mountain; so me an' Bernard go. So!"

"What the hell's you gassin' about! Who's this sergeant guy you's talking about, anyhow?" inquired Joe, re-entering the lists.

"Him sergeant of police. Him down at lake. Him one devil. Me an' Bernard go before him come!"

"Gosh, is that all your trouble?" remarked Slippery, relieved. "Say, Joe, that must be that long-legged string-bean we saw legging around with the girl. Say, listen now," he addressed the two breeds in a paternal voice. "No sergeant is going to catch up with us. How can he? He can't follow our tracks on the water, can he? An' nobody has seen us, or know we's here, do they? That's sense, ain't it? An' even if he should happen to smell us

out, well, I guess he ain't the first cop we have slipped it across; an' don't you forget it! We'll fix his clock for him good an' proper; so you just forget all about him! He ain't going to worry you! "

But the two breeds were not convinced.

"You not know sergeant," persisted Moiese. "He find you, you bet you. Me an' Bernard not stay. Too much risk! "

The sulphur and brimstone in Joe at last bubbled over.

"You two —— of double-crossers! " he stormed. "You'll dam' well stay, or I'll break every —— bone in your —— bodies! So now you know! " And he glared truculently at the two offenders. But the latter did not quail before his outburst. Instead a ghost of a smile flitted over each face, and Bernard rendered the first contribution to the conversation.

"You try! " he remarked quietly.

But even in this crisis Joe's innate prudence and aversion to direct action conquered his rage. He had seen Bernard and Moiese pack their outfit across the portages; had seen them handle without effort loads which he, Joe, would have lifted with about the same ease as he would the Rocky Mountains; and he further knew that not alone were the two strong and wiry, but also as nimble as monkeys. In short: Joe realized that he had made a wrong lead; but also that he had to save his face.

"Say, this ain't the time for no ructions," he said with an attempt at quiet dignity. "We have to talk this over as gents! Ain't that so, Slippery? "

"We sure have," answered Slippery lugubriously, mentally consigning Schinky, Injuns, cops and skirts to the nether region. He was nothing if not thorough. "You two wait here a minute, while me an' Joe talk over this mess."

He dragged Joe out of earshot of the two breeds; and after a fairly lengthy discussion—Slippery pleading, and Joe evidently unwilling to yield to his persuasions—they at last seemed to have come to some kind of an understanding. They returned to where Moiese and Bernard were waiting, and Slippery

addressed them briskly, his face radiating benevolence and good-will:

"Listen here. If you two guys get twenty dollars more a month, bringing your pay up to a round hundred, will you stay?" and he looked at them with that wistful, expectant look on his face, often found in music-hall comedians when they are awaiting applause for what they consider a particularly neat gag. But, as is often the case, the expected applause proved a chimera. Not the slightest trace of enthusiasm or gratification could the disgusted Slippery detect on the two immovable faces of the breeds at this handsome offer.

"Me an' Bernard go talk it over," announced Moiese after a somewhat uncomfortable pause; and Slippery again took heart. The fish were nibbling at the bait. Moiese and Bernard retired a few paces and started an earnest conversation in Cree. To their astonishment Joe and Slippery saw them point upwards several times; and instinctively they tilted their chins towards the sky, and, completely at sea, they scanned the empty ether.

"Say! What the hell's they pointing to heaven for?" inquired Slippery uneasily; after they had brought their faces back to earth once more. "Do you reckon they's getting religious or something?" But Joe could advance no theory as to the meaning of the mystic rite.

As a matter of fact, the two cautious breeds were merely discussing the probability of the camp having been spotted through the medium of the haze caused by the heat from the fire. They agreed that neither from Clear Water Lake nor even from Grassy Hill River was the haze discernible against the sky; but, of course, there was a possibility that somebody with sharp eyes, from one of the higher ridges in the Grassy Hills, might be able to discover the tell-tale, faint evidence of an existent fire in that locality. There was of course that risk; but in case they were caught, they would jointly protest and swear that they had absolutely no previous knowledge of, nor any hand in, the outrage which had taken place; and,

furthermore, that after the kidnapping had taken place, they had been virtually kept prisoners to prevent them from raising an alarm. This, they agreed unanimously, would be a strong and effective line of defence. They had both had considerable experience of court proceedings in the past, and understood and appreciated the value of having evidence cut and dried beforehand!

After some further discussion they eventually decided on their course of action, and, closing the meeting, they returned to their employers.

"Me an' Bernard stay if you pay hundred-fifty dollars month," announced Moiese as spokesman.

"Say! Are you two off your chumps?" almost squealed Slippery; while Joe glared furiously at the two, on the verge of another eruption. "Of all the double-crossing, blackmailing guys I ever saw, you two take the cake! Ain't you got no shame?" Slippery was getting virtuous in his excitement. "Ain't you got no decency, going back on your partners like this? Gosh! It's a wonder you have the nerve to face us with a raw proposition like this! An' us treating you as pals all this time! Say! What do you think we are? Wall Street millionaires? Aw, come down to earth an' talk sense!"

But Slippery's impassioned pleading and appeals to the softer and better part of their nature stirred no chord in the breeds.

"Hundred-fifty dollars, or we go!" repeated Moiese, unmoved.

"God'll-mighty! If you ain't the barefacedest bunch of robbers I ever clapped my lamps on in my natural!" continued Slippery, his squeal rising to such a pitch that his voice all but cracked. "Here you two guys's having a soft snap doin' nothin', an' we offer you a hundred bucks to do it. An' on top of all that you go ahead an' try to sand-bag another fifty smackers out of us! Say! Talk sense! A hundred it is! You won't go back on your old pals, will you?"

But the pleading pathos of Slippery's voice was lost on the two hardened breeds.

"Hundred-fifty month!" chanted Moiese, and Bernard nodded his head in agreement.

"You two guys won't get a cent more'n hundred! That's flat! So take it or leave it!" shouted Joe, his right hand itching to produce the neat automatic which was snugly nestling in his left armpit, and introduce that into the argument. But he had enough common sense left to perceive that such a course must remain a fond and idle dream only. If he shot the two breeds, he and Slippery would be as much up the pole as ever; and, besides, there would be the prospect of facing a charge of murder some time in the future. So he kept his hand under control.

"All right! We go!" announced Moiese.

But Slippery shouted excitedly:

"Wait a minute!" And, grabbing Joe by the arm, he led him aside.

"Have a heart, Joe!" he commenced in a mournful voice, as soon as they were out of earshot of their mutinous retainers. "Them guys has got us by the short hairs! You know, we can't afford to let them go. Who's going to cook our grub, an' paddle them damned canoes back to Portage Bend, an' carry all our stuff across them —— portages, if we let 'em go? We can't do it, an' me for one ain't even going to try. It would bust up the whole proposition if they go. They might even tell that we have that damned skirt; an' then where'd we be? Let's give 'em their one-fifty. It's Schinky's funeral, anyhow, so we won't lose nothing. It's a go, ain't it?"

"Say, Schinky may start some kicking at our expense bill, if I ain't much mistaken," said Joe in a doubtful voice.

"Let him kick. He would kick at an expense of one cent, anyhow, so where's the odds? We can always square Schinky. There ain't no other way around it. We have to give them two swines the spandulicks, or bust the show! We can't afford to lose them!"

"All right, then!" grumbled Joe. "But it hurts like hell to give in to a pair of double-crossers like

them two. But we may be able to slip something across them yet," he finished hopefully.

"Atta boy! We sure'll try hard, an' you can tell the world I said so!" agreed Slippery, brightening. "Well, let's go an' slip the glad news to them two blots on the landscape!"

The glad news was promptly slipped; but the two recipients did not bubble over with boisterous gratification and enthusiasm. They received it without comment and with seeming indifference.

Their differences being at last settled, Joe again produced the letter for Hiram J.

"Now, who of you guys is going to take this over to the camp of them Yanks?"

"I go," said Bernard, "for twenty dollars!"

This bald-faced announcement caused the smouldering embers of the late war to again break out in full flame. Renewed wrangling! Joe was raving and threatening, going well on all six cylinders with throttle wide open; Slippery was cajoling and appealing; the breeds were maintaining a silent, stoical indifference to the proceedings. Result: unconditional surrender on the part of the Syndicate.

"Here you are," growled Joe, scowling, and holding the letter towards Bernard as soon as the peace terms had been ratified. But Bernard did not at once take the proffered envelope. Instead he held out his hand and said simply:

"Twenty dollars."

"What-cha-mean, twenty dollars?" inquired Joe.

"I want twenty dollars now," explained Bernard.

"That's all right. I'll give 'em to you when you get back!" said Joe, breathing heavily, his scowl deepening.

"Me want money now!" persisted Bernard.

Joe glared at him for a full minute, showing strong indications that he was again on the verge of giving his celebrated impersonation of Vesuvius during the last days of Pompeii. But the preceding clashes had taught him the futility of rage, abuse or cajoling when dealing with the two thick-skinned and wholly abandoned breeds. So, with a comprehensive and exhaustive

string of particularly sulphurous oaths, he produced the cash, and placed it in Bernard's hospitable fist.

"Gosh! If them guys ain't the dandiest pair of low-down hold-up men I ever ran across! Not even trusting a coupla gents; but squeezing the pay out beforehand, as if we was a coupla crooks!" was Slippery's virtuous comment on the painful incident, as they watched Bernard take his departure.

The day dragged along. All nature was smiling; but found no sparkling reflection in the two members of the kidnapping Syndicate. They were wrapped in a shroud of gloom so dense that no sunbeam could hope to penetrate or dispel it. That festive air of satisfaction and elation, which one would expect to find hovering over a camp, the members of which had just effected a long-wanted, brilliant coup, was conspicuous by its absence.

Bernard returned in due course, and reported success; but even this pleasing piece of information did not succeed in reviving the drooping spirits of Joe and Slippery.

Miss Morgan did insist on treating them as excrescences of the lowest, and most loathsome, order on the tree of existence. Slippery had constituted himself valet and head-waiter to the girl, and was assiduously striving to establish more friendly relations; but his most propitiatory overtures had been met with acid rebuffs. He had enjoined Moiese, who was acting as cook, to soar to his loftiest culinary flights, and had brought the girl a breakfast and lunch "fit for a queen," as he modestly described the meals; only to have to listen to an adverse comparison between the, to him, delectable dishes, and the staple diet of a pig! And he had, further, had to stand by and listen to a brisk, snappy lecture, of which ptomaine poisoning formed the subject matter. And all this had wounded Slippery to a degree! His spirits were, consequently, well below zero; and he spent his leisure hours giving free rein to his bitterly misogynistic philosophy. And even Joe felt too low to have the heart to check his partner's elegiacal outpourings over the theme "skirt!"

Taken all around, it was a rotten day! And they

almost shuddered at the thought of having to face about one month of this kind of life. And there rose in the heart of each the fervent prayer that Hiram J. would show some quick action; thus curtailing their agony!

## CHAPTER X

As soon as the canoes, which were to search for Miss Morgan, had departed, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan had climbed the hill up to the summer-house, from where they would have a fairly extensive view over the lake. They had not noticed a face which had been peering at them from between some bushes at the crest of the hill, and which had been suddenly withdrawn as they started up the slope.

Up in the summer-house they seated themselves side by side and watched the lake. Far out they could still discern two dots which marked the canoes, which were to search the opposite shore and the islands; but apart from them the lake was empty. The sergeant's and Hayes' canoes were screened by the trees on the near shore. The lake, glittering in the bright sunshine, seemed so placid and friendly, and even the usually so dark and forbidding-looking spruces had relaxed their sternness and had become almost jovial-looking under the magic rays of the sun, so it seemed utterly incongruous to connect tragedy with that smiling scene. And yet, back in the heads of the two simmered a dull something, which they did not dare analyse even to themselves.

So intent were they on watching the lake, that a slight rustling in the brush behind the arbour completely escaped their notice. They started up as if stung when they heard a slight thud right behind them, and simultaneously a voice shouting the one word: "Letter!"

They both spun around quickly and discovered to

their amaze a somewhat bulky envelope lying on the floor, and, further, through the trellis work, the back of a man fast disappearing into the brush.

For a few moments they stood watching the envelope with tense interest, as if it might be a merrily ticking bomb; then Mr. Morgan recovered himself, and with a muttered: "What is up now, I wonder?" he strode over and retrieved the packet. On the outside was neatly typed: "Hiram J. Morgan, Esq.," nothing more. Not a little puzzled he tore the envelope open and fished out a type-written letter to which was pinned a sheaf of other papers. No sooner had he commenced perusing the letter, when he let out a roar which would have put an Apache to shame, and which certainly scared Mrs. Morgan nearly out of her wits.

"She is kidnapped!" he shouted. "Kidnapped!" he repeated with rising inflection.

"Who is kidnapped?" asked Mrs. Morgan, bewildered. She had not quite recovered from the effects of that initial war-whoop yet.

"Ain't I telling you?" almost yelled Hiram J., throwing grammar to the wall, and executing an intricate solo dance in his excitement. "They have kidnapped Marion, the swine! Where is the sergeant? I must get hold of the sergeant at once!" And he rushed out of the summer-house, leaving his wife standing there like a modern edition of the petrified wife of Lot's; utterly bewildered, and half afraid that the strain of the morning had been too much for her husband, and that his brain had snapped at last!

"Hey! Hey!" shouted Hiram J., exerting his lungs and vocal chords to their utmost capacity. Those men who were still in camp came on the run on hearing this Anglo-Saxon battle-cry. Amongst the also rans were Ben Giddy and Marie. Ben came rushing out of the cook-shack brandishing a long fork on which was speared a freshly cooked dough-nut; and Marie, who had indulged in a tentative attack of hysterics, caused by Mammeselle's mysterious disappearance, came diving out of her tent, white cap tilted drunkenly over one ear, eyes red and hair disordered. The whole assembly were treated to the astonishing sight of

Hiram J. coming running full tilt down the hill, waving a paper wildly in one hand, and roaring out his battle-cry from time to time. He reached the bottom without breaking his neck; but almost out of breath. In a few terse words he explained the situation to his retainers, and dispatched some of them to fetch the sergeant and Hayes without delay. The dramatic possibilities of the moment being exhausted, the retainers retired to their various interrupted tasks; but Hiram J. commenced stamping forwards and backwards on the shore near the jetty, impatiently awaiting the sergeant's return. Here he was joined for a few minutes by his wife, who had at last found her way down from the hill; but on having had the circumstances, as known to her husband, explained to her, she retired to her tent to lie down, on the plea of a headache. Hiram J. continued his lonely patrol of the beach, looking more and more like a caged grizzly-bear, suffering from an attack of liver, as the time went on. As soon as the sergeant's canoe appeared on the sky-line, the little craft cleaving the water in two rolls of white foam, he commenced to impart his stupendous news to Weston in a series of roars which were quite unintelligible; and swept by Mr. Morgan's heavy verbal barrage Weston's canoe shot alongside the jetty.

"What's up?" he inquired breathlessly, as he jumped out of the canoe.

"Haven't I just been telling you?" shouted Hiram J., executing a series of fancy steps in his excitement. "I should think the whole neighbourhood would know about it by this time! My daughter's been kidnapped! Read this!" And he thrust the letter with enclosures into the sergeant's eager hands.

As the sergeant read, his face cleared.

"Thank God it isn't worse," he ejaculated with relief.

"Worse! Worse!" almost yelped Hiram J. in his indignation. "What could be worse than having one's only daughter in the hands of a gang of ruffians? Answer me that!"

"Well, Mr. Morgan, you would have felt convinced of there being worse things, if you had shared my

experience on the lake! " And in a few sentences he related to Hiram J. how he had found his daughter's canoe capsized on the lake, and the obvious inference which he had been forced to draw from the find.

" Good Lord! " cried Mr. Morgan, sobered and pale, when the sergeant had finished his recital. " It would have about killed her mother if she had heard about the overturned canoe before we got this letter. I suppose we ought to be slightly grateful to these ruffians for giving us timely advice about our daughter's safety, anyhow. But what are we going to do now? I am all in, and don't seem to be able to think clearly. Anyhow, this is more in your line, Sergeant; so what do you suggest? " And he wiped his dripping brow with his pocket handkerchief, while he looked pleadingly at Weston. Hiram J., who had kept cool and calm on the Exchange when the surging swarm of humanity about him were shouting and cursing, and when the loss of one's head for the fraction of a second might mean the simultaneous loss of all one had in the world, he, who owed his present opulence to his ability in keeping his head during every vicissitude of high finance, had now gone almost completely to pieces!

The sergeant did not answer at once. Instead he once more scanned the letter and documents.

" I can't quite get the hang of the whole business," he said at last. " I see roughly that somebody wants you to sign these papers in order to have the Morgan Fruit Import Syndicate dissolved, and that that somebody intends to hold your daughter a captive till the documents are signed, sealed and delivered; but what is the actual object? "

" Oh, good Lord! It's too long and intricate a business to be gone into fully now," groaned Hiram J. " But I'll try to give you a general outline. I happened to smell out that a certain concern tried to collar the whole of the fruit import, and smash the rest of us all to hell. I at once set to work and collected around me a bunch, and when I left New York we had just completed all arrangements for a Syndicate which would knock the other fellows into a cocked hat. If I sign these papers it would mean that our group will imme-

diately be cut up; the other fellows will take action at once; and then good-bye to the rest of us!"

"Do you mean that your business will be ruined or something if you sign these papers?" inquired Weston, who had found Hiram J.'s explanation somewhat lacking in lucidity.

"Not quite as bad as that, I suppose, but it would be a nasty knock. However, I would be willing to go to any lengths to save my daughter from her present predicament, though it would hurt like blazes to be licked in this manner. I don't mind a fight, and I don't whine if I happen to get the worst of it; but it is this hitting below the belt which breaks me all up! Gosh, it'll almost break my heart if I have got to give in to these fellows after a rotten deal like this!"

"But surely you can expose these fellows some way. Sue them in court for this outrage or something. And an exposure like that would surely break them up?"

"Good Lord, Sergeant! You don't know more about crooked finance than a newborn babe, I notice. Do you think that those fellows have left any trails to connect them up with this kidnapping? Not they! You could take them before any court in the U.S.A. and you wouldn't find one Grand Jury that would return a true bill against them. And, besides, even if I go to the courts about it, the mischief would have been done and past all remedy! But all this leads us nowhere. What do you advise me to do?"

"Well, don't sign anything in a hurry. We want to get the better of these crooks. There is Hayes coming now. We'll discuss it all with him, and between us we ought to hit on some plan."

Hiram J. felt disappointed. When he sent for the sergeant, he had, somehow, expected the latter to turn up with a rush, and then, almost in his stride, to produce his daughter like a kind of a hat-trick. But instead of that the sergeant approached the whole matter in a maddeningly deliberate manner. Hiram J. considered a few words on the subject in order.

"Aren't we rather wasting our time? Wouldn't it be better to set out in pursuit of the kidnappers at once?"

"No use to set out in pursuit before we know in which direction to do the pursuing," answered Weston dryly. "We have to collect all the data we can, so we know what we are at. Don't you worry, Mr. Morgan! One hour more or less won't make any difference, and it is no use starting anything before we have formed a few plans. When we first start going, watch our dust! Leave it all to me!"

Hiram J. had to admit that there was something in what the sergeant had said, and he decided to wait and see, though he was burning with impatience inside.

A few minutes later Hayes arrived, and the situation was rapidly outlined for him. The recital drew from him a stream of running comments, composed of words, which, though forceful and illustrative, would hardly have been found in any self-respecting dictionary.

"Now let us see where we stand!" said the sergeant at last. "Did you notice any suspicious-looking strangers hanging about the town before you left, Jim?"

"Waal, now you mention it, there was a couple of tough-looking sons of Uncle Sam's hanging around the pool-room," drawled Jim.

"What did they look like?"

"Like Chicago toughs," answered Jim promptly. "They had the boys guessin', 'cause they didn't seem to have no business or nothing. That's the reason I noticed them. They seemed to be pretty thick with Joe Moiese an' Dan Bernard."

"That's rather interesting," said Weston thoughtfully. "Those two are about the worst breeds in the district. Yes, I think we are getting warm. Did the two strangers look like woodsmen?"

"Not them!" answered Jim contemptuously, emphasizing his disgust by directing a jet of tobacco-juice at a stone some five feet away with unerring aim. "They looked as if they would be about as much at home in the woods as a bottle of booze at a tee-total congress."

"Well, listen now!" said the sergeant briskly. "I have been thinking things over, and this is the way I

sum up the situation. The only way the kidnappers can get Miss Morgan out of the country is either to take her back the way we came, or else work around either by the west or by the east. The two last alternatives would mean following such difficult and twisting trails, that they would decidedly not appeal to any man not used to the woods. On the other hand, to return the way we came would be folly, as it is far too public. People up here are curious about strangers. They would be sure to investigate, and put a spoke in the wheel of the kidnappers. Trust their two breed partners for making this clear to the white desperados, if they haven't thought of it themselves! The most obvious course open to them, therefore, is to lie doggo somewhere in the woods, till you, Mr. Morgan, have carried out the instructions of whoever hired them, and . . ." Here he suddenly broke off, and seemed to be groping around in his head for some elusive memory. "Damn!" he suddenly shouted. "I think I have got it!" And without further explanation he started on the run to the jetty, where Angus was seated, placidly smoking, beside their canoe. An animated conversation at once sprang up between the two.

"What on earth is up with him?" inquired Hiram J. in blank astonishment.

"I guess he's got a hunch. That head of his is sure a quick worker, and he can spot a fire where you wouldn't hardly notice smoke," answered Jim Hayes, contemplating the sergeant with the smug pride of a Sunday-school teacher watching his star pupil spread himself before the superintendent. "Gosh, if I had half of the brains of Wess's I would be sitting in Parliament by now, smoking big cigars an' drinkin' champagne all day!"

But Hiram J. was only half listening to Hayes' almost libellous characteristic of a Parliamentarian. He was watching Weston anxiously, wondering what the next development would be.

At last the sergeant and Angus seemed to have come to some kind of understanding, and the former returned hurriedly to Hiram J. and Hayes.

"I think we have established the location of their camp!" he said hurriedly. "While we were up in the Grassy Hills the other day Angus spotted signs of a fire up north and told me about it. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, and had forgotten all about it; but it suddenly came back to me a little while ago. I have just talked it over with Angus, and he informs me that he knows of just such a spot where people would be likely to lie hidden up there where he spotted the fire. Now, Angus and I are going to investigate that place, and any other likely places in that locality in case the first proves a disappointment. But we don't want to take any chances. So you, Jim, take the fastest canoe you have got in your outfit, and your best man, and run down to the Gulch. If they have tried to get out that way you'll find their tracks on the portage on the north side of the rapids. They won't have shot the rapids with loaded canoes and a bunch of greenhorns. Moiese and Bernard are too wise for that! If you find their tracks, you know what to do!" he suggested grimly. "If you don't find any signs of them there, follow the Grassy Hills River up to the spot I have in mind. There is a creek runs into the river a couple of miles north of the place where that trail is cut across to the lake, and some way up this creek a brook comes running down from a hollow in the hills. It is in that hollow that Angus suspects the camp of being located. You come straight for that place. If Angus and I have drawn a blank there, I'll leave instructions so you can follow our trail. Better take grub for four or five days along with you; and, of course, your artillery. You never know how far we will have to travel in case they have made a bolt for it, or what they might do when they get cornered. Now, get a move on!"

"Watch my dust!" shouted Hayes, and to Hiram J., "Don't you worry no more, Mr. Morgan, now that ol' Wess has gone on the warpath!" And with that parting assurance he was off.

"Well, I'll be hustling along too," continued Weston. "Please tell Mrs. Morgan not to be uneasy.

I'll guarantee to have Miss Morgan here in a few days' time at the latest. Good-bye! " And he ran down to his canoe, leaving Hiram J. in a state of bewilderment, excitement and hope.

The sergeant and Angus first raced across to their camp, where they each secured a blanket, their rifles, the sergeant's revolver, and a minimum of grub for a five days' trip. They intended to travel as light as possible.

They next laid a course for the portage. After a close examination of the ground, Angus, who was an expert in such matters, declared that he had found the footprints of the girl and two white men on the trail.

" That clinches the matter! " cried the sergeant, elated. " I think we have our party now! "

They decided that it would be poor policy to follow the portage across. This would in all probability be watched, and they did not intend to advertise their approach. The sergeant knew from long experience the advantage of a surprise attack.

They, therefore, continued right up to the northern extremity of the lake, and from there they cut cross-country to the river. It was a long and arduous trip through the forest, as there were no trails; and packing their canoe and outfit materially added to the difficulties of the task. Often they had to cut their way with axes through the brush and scrub timber, and at other times they had to make long detours around bogs and muskegs. But they kept doggedly on, and at long last they reached the river. They sat down by the bank for a much needed rest, and Angus informed Weston that, according to the former's estimation, they were about a couple of miles above the spot they were heading for, and on the opposite bank of the river. After a short council of war it was agreed that they cross the river where they were, *cache* their canoe and outfit in the brush on the opposite bank, and then sneak up to the suspected place on foot; attacking the abductors from the rear.

This programme was followed, as soon as they had had some cold lunch, washed down with water.

For obvious reasons they did not dare make a fire.

Silently the two men glided through the timber. They were both experienced woodsmen, and hardly a rustle indicated their stealthy progress. At last Angus, by a cautious sign, made known to the sergeant that their objective lay just beyond a hill which was rearing up in front of them.

With the utmost caution they slid up the hill, wriggling through the undergrowth on their stomachs like two giant lizards. Suddenly, as they neared the crest, Angus stopped and lifted his nose. He sniffed a few times, and then winked at the sergeant. The latter, thereupon, also treated himself to a whiff of atmosphere. There was no doubt about it. There was hanging on the air the tang of a fire!

They now increased their caution, and slowly, with many stops, they wriggled their way farther and farther up, till they at last, from the friendly shelter of some brush, had a bird's-eye view of a camp. Right below them were three tents, and in front of one of the tents their eyes discovered a most gratifying and agreeable vision. On a log sat Miss Morgan, chin in hand, gazing moodily down the valley. On following the direction of her gaze with their own optics the sergeant and Angus beheld, seated by a small pond, two white men and their old friends Moiese and Bernard.

Not being warned by any sixth sense that Retribution was eyeing them vindictively from the crest of the hill, Joe, Slippery and their retainers calmly occupied themselves with the tasks of the moment. The two breeds were preparing tea by a fire which they fed carefully with dry twigs, one at a time. Slippery had insisted on five o'clock tea being included in Miss Morgan's diet, to show her that her captors were "real gents-o'-the-world." Joe and Slippery were sitting close by, busily "rolling the bones." They had started a game of craps as a last protective bulwark against the spreading gloom. They were both, normally, keen devotees of the game; but to-day the game seemed to have lost something of its usual

charm. They did not succeed in introducing into the pastime the necessary snap and ginger; and in the appropriate ritual were missing the right elements of carefree and cheerful abandon. The mystic sentences, "Come eleven!" "Be good to me bones, youse knows I loves youse!" "Come little seven!"—invocations peculiar to the worship of the god Crap, which should be chanted crisply and brightly—were delivered by each in turn in a mournful monotone, reminiscent of a funeral dirge.

The sergeant, having finished his examination of the stronghold of the kidnappers, whispered to Angus: "Keep them covered; but don't fire before I tell you to!" He then carefully slid his rifle forward, took careful aim at the water near the group by the pond, and fired. He followed his shot with a peremptory and loud: "Hands up!"

The quartette by the pond was stirred into immediate action. The splash from the bullet, hitting the water, had warned them that the shot was not merely a playful vagary on the part of somebody, and that the attendant shout was not to be considered as a kind of suit-yourself-proposition. They jumped up like Jacks-in-the-box—the dice being left on the ground with almost an air of surprised consternation about them—and stretched their hands well over their heads; and in this position they awaited with considerable chagrin and trepidation the further developments.

"Keep them covered, Angus!" came the voice of doom from the hill. "Shoot if they move; but don't damage them more than you can help!" Having delivered this dictum in a loud voice, to prevent his captives lulling themselves into a state of disastrous sanguinism, the sergeant slid down the hill-side. Having reached the floor of the basin he walked straight up to Miss Morgan.

"Are you all right?" he inquired, removing his battered hat.

"Yes, thank you!"

"And have they treated you anywhere near decently?"

"Under the circumstances, yes!" answered Miss

Morgan with some reluctance. She felt that it would have been more of a satisfaction to her if she could have reversed the statement; but she decided to be fair.

"Excellent! I am awfully glad!" exclaimed Weston with a wholehearted smile. "I must say I was rather worried. Gentlemen of the kidney of your late hosts are generally somewhat eccentric and unorthodox in their methods, I understand. But as long as you are all right, that's all that matters! Oh, by the way! I am afraid I was rather abrupt when I arrived. I really think I forgot to say good morning! But you must excuse my seeming rudeness."

"Oh, that is all right," said the girl handsomely. "But how did you manage to find me?"

"That was easy," grinned the sergeant. "Those babes in the wood over there, in their trusting innocence and inexperience, showed me the way. In other words, Angus happened to spot their fire from the Grassy Hills when we were up there hunting; and he told me about it. As soon as we heard what had happened to you we hurried along, and . . ."

Bang! came the report from Angus's rifle at that moment.

The hapless Slippery had been visited by an inquisitive fly, which had squatted on his nose, with the apparent intention of homesteading that delectable part of Slippery's geography. Slippery had disputed its right, and had tried to evict the intruder by contorting his nasal organ till it had a fair semblance to a cork-screw; but without success. The fly calmly polished its wings with its hind legs, and its head with its fore legs; utterly indifferent to the eccentric behaviour of its perch. It was the moment when the fly decided to snatch a free meal from the pealing skin on Slippery's nose that the latter decided that strong measures were indicated! He lowered his right hand with the intention of taking firm action; but the report from Angus's rifle, and a small spurt of earth some five feet in front of his toes, made him abruptly abandon the attempt; and he again froze into his personation of a Pharaonic priest, calling down the invocation of heaven over the human sacrifice.

"Gosh!" he gasped, his eyes bulging; and even the fly was scandalized and flew away.

The sergeant glanced across to where the quartette were standing.

"The gentlemen must have been getting restless," he remarked to Miss Morgan with a grin, "or else Angus would not have reminded them of his presence in that rude, abrupt manner. I had better clip the wings of yon birds before they start getting reckless. Will you please take this lethal weapon, Miss Morgan," he continued, handing her his revolver, "and help me keep an eye on those blots on the landscape, till Angus can join us?"

Miss Morgan accepted the proffered six-shooter, and together they advanced towards the group, the sergeant keeping his rifle at the ready. When they had got within ten feet of their captives, the sergeant ordered a halt and issued his directions.

"Please, Miss Morgan, will you cover that little one there," he said, pointing at Slippery. "And don't be squeamish about shooting if he moves. But fire low down at his limbs. Don't kill him if you can help it! It would be a shame to let him off as easy as that!" A speech which Slippery found callous and heartless to the highest degree, and in the worst possible taste!

"I will attend to him, Sergeant," answered Miss Morgan in a tone which did not sound nice and gentle to the susceptible Slippery. And he hoped that she knew how to handle a revolver properly, so there would not be any accidents.

"I'll take care of the rest of the Sunday-school!" continued the sergeant. "You, Moiese and Bernard, can lower your paws; but don't move!"

"Say, Sergeant . . ." commenced Moiese; but Weston cut him short.

"No you won't, Moiese! You can spring your packet of woes when you get asked!" Weston raised his voice to a shout: "Come on down, Angus!"

A few minutes later Angus had joined the happy reunion, and the sergeant at once mapped out for him his immediate activities:

"Now, Angus, relieve those gentlemen of any weapons or other instruments of aggression they may possess. I think you will find a pistol cosily concealed under the left armpit of each!" Angus tested this statement and found it correct.

"Got any rope around here, Moiese?" continued the sergeant.

"Aha!" grunted Moiese sullenly.

"Good! Perhaps you'll be kind enough to produce said rope—and quickly! Angus, you go along with him, and if he tries any monkey-tricks, you know what to do!"

Angus nodded, and moved off in the wake of Moiese, who had started towards the tent normally occupied by him and Bernard. They soon reappeared with a coil of fine, but stout, manilla cord.

"Just the thing!" remarked Weston approvingly. "Now, Angus! Start on the wee one, and truss him up good and solid, so that we can relieve Miss Morgan of her responsibility!"

Angus set to work with vim and goodwill, and in a few minutes Slippery was sitting on the ground, bound hand and foot.

"Thank you, Miss Morgan! Sorry I have bothered you for so long. Your arm must be quite numb. All right, Angus; the next gentleman!"

Soon Joe was sitting beside his partner in sorrow, also securely trussed. The sergeant turned to Miss Morgan:

"Would you like to go to your tent, or do you want to remain here? I'll have to stay to entertain these gentlemen. You would rather stay here if you had the deck-chair from your tent? Right! Angus, please fetch the chair you'll find in that tent over there, and bring it here. Isn't Angus a marvel for trussing up people though, Miss Morgan?" continued Weston admiringly, when Angus had departed. "I doubt if Houdini could have disentangled himself if Angus had had a go at him."

Joe and Slippery were inclined to agree with the sergeant, having had personal experience in the matter; but, somehow, they felt it inexpedient to voice their

opinion. Miss Morgan was frankly indifferent; so the matter was dropped without discussion. Soon Angus returned with the chair, and Miss Morgan settled herself comfortably into it. The sergeant squatted, cross-legged, on the ground near her, and facing him were the prisoners; Joe and Slippery in front, and behind them, unfettered but sullen, the two breeds. Angus was immediately dispatched to fetch the sergeant's and his canoe, and their outfit.

"Seeing we are all comfy, we'll start a little preliminary inquiry into this business; while we are waiting for Angus," commenced the sergeant.

"An' if you question us, we won't answer! See?" cut in Joe.

Weston contemplated the speaker reflectively for a few moments.

"I am not absolutely sure about that," he said at last with a grim smile. "I have a very persuasive way about me when the occasion calls for it. But let that pass! At present I am more interested in what Miss Morgan has to say. I know more or less all about you two. To put the thing in your own vernacular: I have a line on you two guys! So that's that, as you may say. Would you be kind enough, Miss Morgan, to relate all the circumstances in connection with your capture?"

Miss Morgan, nothing loath, promptly recited the whole affair in plain, comprehensive language; glossing over nothing; exaggerating nothing. But at the same time she did not hold forth the flimsiest circumstance which could have been grasped by Messrs. Slippery and Joe as a saving straw of extenuation. Her account of past events particularly grieved Slippery. Not once, during the recital, did she dwell on his own correct, conciliatory gent-of-the-world attitude towards her! A low-down, dirty deal, he reflected bitterly, and just what one might expect from a skirt!

When the tale had been told, the sergeant contemplated the two offenders for a while.

"So they threatened to truss you up and gag you?" he said at last, and he added somewhat grimly:

"Good!" a sentiment which the Syndicate refused to second and support.

"And whose was that brilliant brainwave, upsetting your canoe?" proceeded Weston, airing a pet personal grievance.

Miss Morgan extended her right, shapely hand towards Joe—who, however, was not in the right mood to admire its perfect mould just then—and the index finger pointed straight at that gentleman.

"That is the man who did it, and he seemed to positively glory in the idea that he would make you believe that I was drowned!" she said vindictively.

"I see," remarked the sergeant quietly; but the look he bent on Joe made Slippery, who intercepted it, shake hands with himself, metaphorically, because he was not the guilty party; and his spirits rose several points.

"And this other man? Did he approve of the proceedings?" continued the sergeant.

"He most assuredly did! And quite wholeheartedly!"

"I see!" repeated the sergeant; and the look with which he now favoured Slippery caused the latter to promptly cancel his previous handshake; and the mercury in his spiritual barometer retired right down into the bulb.

The sergeant now accosted the two half-breeds:

"You, Moiese and Bernard; how did you happen to get mixed up in this business? I thought claim-jumping and booze-smuggling was about your limit on the path of iniquity."

Moiese at once poured forth their prepared story in Cree. Weston listened to the sad, pathetic tale with a feeling akin to admiration. He had had dealings with Moiese and Bernard in the past, and he mentally put the story down as one of their very best efforts!

"So you two poor innocents were lured into this affair through false pretences on the part of those naughty men," he said, when Moiese had run dry. "Tut, tut! Too bad! In this world of injustice the innocent so often are made to suffer along with the guilty, so I am afraid that you will all be granted free

board and lodgings by the Dominion for more years than I care to count. Well, such is life! "

"Say! You talk a lot!" spoke up Joe. "You ain't judge an' jury, lemme tell you!"

"And lucky for you that I am not!" countered the sergeant smartly. "If I had been, things would have gone hard with you! I think I would have started in by knocking your heads together; and then," he glanced at them reflectively for a few moments, "and then I think I would have repeated the treatment from time to time, about once an hour, say. And I have a good mind to start in right now!" he flung at them, glaring vindictively at the two principal offenders.

Slippery quaked and wished himself elsewhere. He abhorred physical violence, and particularly when he was listed as a possible or certain victim. But Joe was not so easily cowed. He glared back at the sergeant and quoth:

"Say! It's all right for youse to show off in front of a skirt, when we's tied up an' helpless. You wouldn't have been so chirpy if me an' my partner had been free; I don't think! Talk is cheap!" he ended with an ugly sneer.

"It is!" agreed the sergeant heartily, with a grin. "That is the reason I indulge in it so much. Only thing I can afford to revel in without stint these days. Anyhow, cheer up! You may still have the delight and pleasure of interviewing me with your arms and legs in good working order. So be of good cheer. All may still arrange itself for the best."

At this point in the cosy chat between gaoler and prisoner, Miss Morgan created a diversion. She was getting bored. She always did, when she did not happen to hold the centre of the stage. And besides she found the whole conversation utterly frivolous and irrelevant, and lacking in the proper restraint which ought to be exercised when she was present.

"Don't you think, Sergeant, that all these queries and things could be postponed till some other time? It is really not very entertaining to listen to," she said somewhat coldly.

"I am sorry!" exclaimed Weston apologetically.

"Of course, all this must bore you. The inquiry is hereby adjourned."

But Weston was not at all sorry. He was annoyed. Strongly annoyed.

He hated to have anybody interfering between him and prisoners, and he found the girl's interruption extremely tactless and ill-advised. He had kept up the bantering conversation with Joe for a purpose. He had noticed that Joe was about on the boiling point, and that very little was needed to make him boil over. And he knew that when a man boils over he is liable to spill things, which he in calmer moments would have kept coyly tucked away in the most secret recess of his mind. And Weston wanted all the information he could get out of any of the reprobates.

But his annoyance soon died down a little. His sense of justice came to his succour, and he began a plea of defence for the culprit. Of course Miss Morgan had been severely upset by recent events, and consequently inclined to be querulous; and she could not very well be expected to quite understand things; and . . . Anyhow, the prisoner arraigned before his mental tribunal was eventually discharged with a warning.

They all settled down to await Angus's return with more or less impatience. A desultory conversation had sprung up between Miss Morgan and Weston; but there was a certain lack of vim and pep in the dialogue. Slippery was busying himself with some mental speculation as to the probable wages of sin in the present instance; but the vista his imagination conjured up was so decidedly unpleasant, that he decided to go off on a tangent. He, therefore, concentrated on a vision of himself in the bleachers of the Polo Ground; a hot game of ball staged on the diamond; his teeth energetically and rhythmically masticating peanuts; a lump of chewing-gum kept cosily in reserve behind his ear; and, crowning glory, a pop-bottle in his hand, the ultimate aim of which would be some part of the umpire's anatomy, in case there was any funny-business!

Joe, more hardened, calmly meditated on the probable "lines" Stony Mountain penitentiary was run on! He had had no previous experience of Canadian prisons,

simply because this was his first visit to the Dominion. He wondered if the treatment meted out at those places was "bum" or "swell" "dope." Thereupon his mind travelled backwards and tried to make a fair estimate of the probable sentence he would get; but he found that the data he had at his disposal were too meagre. He had heard that it was impossible to "square" a British judge, and the reflection filled him with a strong feeling of injustice and foreboding. He wished all this had happened in the land of freedom and graft! There he would have certain pals who would form a bulwark—well padded with dollars and political pull—which would stand firmly between him and excessive vindictiveness on the part of the judge! And then suddenly a stupendous thought struck him! He was a free-born citizen of the U.S.A., and as such no dam' Britisher had no right to sit in judgment over him! He was a bit vague as to the exact extent to which international courtesy went; but he was positive that it was dam' thick, that he, a free son of a great and friendly republic, should be exposed to such indignities as he was experiencing at present! It wasn't done, treating a representative of a mighty nation that way; and the sooner that long-legged fool of a dam'ed Britisher realized it, the better! He was just about to point out to the sergeant the errors of the latter's ways, when the sound-waves of the valley were violently agitated by a kind of Apache-yell; which was roared forth by a person who suddenly shot up from behind a thick clump of juniper that grew in the gap which formed the gateway to the basin. Miss Morgan and the sergeant looked up and found that the originator of the hearty, though startling, effort was Jim Hayes, who was waving his hat triumphantly in the air as he was striding towards them. Slippery and Joe had their backs towards the new-comer, and on hearing the yell the former had twisted his head so suddenly towards the sound that he had overbalanced, and he was lying helpless on the ground, his *sotto voce* remarks all but singeing the grass in his immediate vicinity. Joe, more deliberate in his actions, was trying hard to make the tip of his nose describe an arc of one

hundred and eighty degrees; but with indifferent success.

"Say! This is sure fine and dandy!" boomed Jim Hayes. "When I found no signs on the portage, we did some quick work gettin' along to this place. I crawled up the hill an' had a peep at things from behind yon juniper, an' say! that little tabbelo which met my optics was sure a sight for sore eyes! You all right, miss?"

"Quite, thank you!"

"Now that's sure fine! So these are the abductors of lone females?" continued Hayes, looking Joe and Slippery over with considerable interest. "Say! What's that little runt thinkin' he's doin'?" he queried, watching with mild curiosity Slippery's futile efforts to regain a vertical position. "Havin' a feed o' grass?"

"I had better give him a hand up," remarked the sergeant, getting to his feet and advancing to Slippery's succour.

"Ain't the sergeant a marvel?" observed Hayes in a confidential undertone to Miss Morgan, his eyes affectionately following Weston.

"Why?" asked Miss Morgan.

"Well, gettin' you out o' this scrape in double quick time for one, o' course," answered Hayes, eyeing Miss Morgan in surprise.

"I can't really see anything marvellous in that," said Miss Morgan, a shade of irritation in her voice. She was commencing to get extremely tired of Hayes' eternal eulogies of Weston. "According to what the sergeant told me himself, he has known about this camp for some time, so I fail to see your point!"

Jim Hayes stared at her for a few moments in frank, open-eyed amazement, and mentally he decided that there were occasions when a "dam' good larruping" would do Miss Morgan a world of good!

"No o' course you wouldn't!" he snapped at last "You wouldn't o' thought it marvellous if a guy flung himself between you and a flyin' bullet! You would only say that he just happened to be there when the bullet happened to come along!" And with that bit of heavy sarcasm he turned on his heel and strode

towards Weston. He did not trust himself to remain any longer for fear of getting rude!

Miss Morgan followed his retreating form with eyes that sparkled with anger, a red spot of resentment flaming on each cheek. Somehow, this common ruffian of a Hayes always managed to make her feel cheap; and she resented it extremely!

"Say, Wess! What's the programme, now?" asked Hayes when he reached the sergeant, who had finished his job as good Samaritan.

"You take Miss Morgan back at once, Jim. We won't keep her parents in suspense more than we can help. I'll wait here for Angus, and we'll bring this little lot along. We'll leave their tents and outfit and send out for them to-morrow. We'll have to take everything with us, when we freight the prisoners down to the Bend."

"Say!" spoke up Joe, who had overheard Weston's remarks, and who considered this a good opportunity to give his instructive lecture on the correct intercourse between nations. "You ain't goin' to touch any of our stuff, see? You ain't got no right to handle us or our things! We's free-born Americans an' . . ."

"Oh, dry up!" ordered the sergeant tersely.

"I ain't! I want to have my say! You'll get into trouble if you . . ."

"If you don't dry up at once," interrupted the sergeant, "I'll gag you!" And to give weight to his threat, he produced his pocket handkerchief and eyed Joe with grim expectation.

Joe realized that he meant business, and decided to keep his views on international etiquette to himself for the time being.

Nor did the programme meet with the unqualified approval of Hayes. As has been mooted before, there had never existed what could possibly be termed a state of easy camaraderie between Miss Morgan and him; but just now, in view of the girl's recent disparaging remarks anent Weston's rescue expedition, he felt that a certain distance—not erring on the short side—between that lady and him would be desirable and satisfying. Frankly, he did not relish the idea of an

outing with her just then; but there was no way out of it, he supposed. Holding the views he did with regard to Weston's interest in the girl, he feared that Weston would hardly see eye to eye with him in the matter. He even had a sneaking suspicion that any opening of his heart along these lines would be accepted by the sergeant with about the same enthusiasm as that exhibited by a man who has just found a dead cockroach mixed up with his last mouthful of beer.

Candidly, he could not understand what a fine sensible fellow like Weston could see in a pretty-faced Jane without any head-fillings, like Miss Morgan. But that was Wess's own funeral! Anyhow, he considered it wise and proper to keep all this to himself.

"All right, Wess," he said without enthusiasm, his self-communion finished. "We'll hustle along at once."

A short while after they had taken their departure Angus turned up. He was promptly set to work piling all the Syndicate's belongings into the tents, which were afterwards tightly laced up, Weston in the meantime keeping a fatherly eye on the captives. Soon the party was on its way. Joe and Slippery—their arms pinioned, but legs free—were given the place of honour at the head of the procession. They travelled in their own canoe, their retainers officiating at the paddles. In their wake came the sergeant and Angus. Before the start Weston had uttered sage counsel and advice to the prisoners:

"Now, see that you have no accidents with your canoe! And if you want to live to a ripe old age—a very indifferent matter, I'll admit—then don't try to play the disappearing act! Angus and I will have our artillery always ready to hand. I give you this information, without prejudice, for what it is worth!"

The counsel, though possibly somewhat sketchy, was accepted by the recipients as entirely sound; and they scrupulously adhered to the spirit of it during the whole of the mournful trip to Camp Morgan!

## CHAPTER XI

THE following morning a council of war was convened in the living tent at Camp Morgan to inquire into the outrage and decide on the steps to be taken against the offenders. The members were: Mr. Morgan, Weston, and Jim Hayes.

The sergeant had duly arrived with his bag at the camp some time during the preceding evening, and had remained there over night. He, Hayes and Angus had taken turn and turn about to guard the prisoners, so as to eliminate any possibilities of corruption and bribery.

Weston still winced at the memory of his reception at the camp. Mr. Morgan—a keen Rotarian, who had gained no mean reputation as a man of eloquence amongst his brother Rotarians—had taken the platform. He was a man who had an acute sense of following the call of duty; and when Providence had equipped him with the gift of oration, it was plainly up to him to parade this gift when opportunity knocked at the door. And here was what he would call a gala occasion! Damsel in distress! Parents weighed down with anxiety and suspense! Young man to the rescue! Daughter restored to the arms of distracted parents! Villains foiled and brought to book . . . well, it would be letting Providence down to let material like that run to waste!

So the sergeant's entry into the camp had become an impressive scene! There was Hiram J. supported by his wife—Miss Morgan had retired to her tent to rest—with his retainers forming a half-circle behind him. Facing him was Weston in front of his prisoners with Angus forming the rear guard. Farther behind still was the lake; the bottom of which occurred to the sergeant as a soothing alternative to his position just then! In the north-east the sun still hovered over the tops of the rearing spruces, as if loath to miss the

fun; and Weston, who had a full view of the orb, noted with some indignation that it had taken on a scarlet hue, reminiscent of the face of a man on the verge of an attack of apoplexy, caused by a superhuman effort to suppress an overdose of bubbling mirth. And, somewhat unreasonably, this increased his bitterness!

Hiram J. spoke well and convincingly, and at some length; and although the sergeant was keeping himself well in hand, in deference to Mrs. Morgan's presence, his face had taken on that strained, stony—almost fishy—appearance usually observed in a young man, who, against his better judgment, has been persuaded to recite "Gunga Din" at a crowded church social, and who finds that he has forgotten every word of the poem when facing the audience!

But even Hiram J. ran dry at last, and the meeting broke up; leaving Weston limp and shaken.

However, he took his seat in the council feeling once more a man and a brother, and that he was capable of again facing the world without a tremor; as the intervening night had given him the time to collect and reorganize the scattered forces of his self-respect and self-esteem.

The meeting was opened by Hiram J., who put to the assembly this profound query:

"What are we going to do with those hooligans?"

The sergeant hesitated. It was a confounded nuisance, of course, but there was no way out of it!

"I suppose I'll have to take them to Portage Bend and charge them," he said slowly and resignedly.

Hiram J. reflected for a few moments.

"That would mean that I would have to give evidence in court?" he inquired after a while.

"Most assuredly! Both you and Mrs. Morgan, Miss Morgan, Hayes, Angus and yours truly. First before the magistrate and later on at the Sessions!" answered Weston lugubriously.

"Confounded nuisance!" muttered Hiram J., his face clouding; and he submerged into a profound study. Several minutes passed by before he again popped to the surface, the complacence of his face showing that

he had found some solution to whatever problem he had been grappling with.

"It won't do!" he said with determination. "It won't do to charge those fellows! It would mean that I would have to hang about the court and have my holidays spoiled. And I refuse to have my holidays spoiled! When everything is said and done, those two fellows are only privates in the ranks, so to speak. It is the principals I want to get at. And I'll make it good and hot for them!" he said grimly. "I'll send a letter to all the leading newspapers in New York, explaining the whole affair, and have them publish the precious papers they sent me to sign! That'll about finish the Gulf Fruit Import Company! People won't stand for a rotten deal like that, where they are using innocent young girls as pawns! Not even in New York," he added as an afterthought. "And the beauty of the whole proposition is, that they haven't got any come-back! They may deny being implicated till they are blue in the face; but nobody will believe them in face of those documents. It is a ripe proposition, all right; and it will bust their concern sky-high!" He paused for a few moments, to gloat in silent ecstasy over that delectable prospect.

"Anyhow," he ended. "We'll have to turn those fellows loose. Really we have! It is the only sensible thing to do!"

"Say! You ain't aimin' to let a bunch of roughnecks like them get away with a raw deal like this free gratis without lettin' them pay?" demanded Hayes, staring at Hiram J. in confounded surprise. "Gosh!" he added, and the disgust he managed to cram into that one expletive, caused Hiram J. to wriggle uneasily in his chair.

"Now look at the thing sensibly, Jim!" he pleaded. "You wouldn't want me to spoil my trip after I have come all the way from New York, would you? And here is another point. Sergeant Weston would have to forfeit the rest of his leave also, if we take further action; and you surely don't want that to happen?"

Hiram J. felt more at ease. That last argument was a corker and ought to clinch the matter, he thought

complacently. But Jim Hayes looked doubtful, wavering between altruism and a thirst for vengeance.

"I guess there is something in what you say," he admitted handsomely. "It would be a gold darn shame to spoil the picnic. But it does get a fellar's goat to think o' them two pieces o' Limburger cheese gettin' away with their dirty deals for nothin'. We might knock their heads together as a kind o' farewell celebration, though!" he ended, brightening. "What say you, Wess?"

Weston, who had been sunk in a deep reverie since Hiram J. had delivered his views on the situation, came to with a start.

"Eh? What's that?" he inquired.

"Mr. Morgan, here, is full out for lettin' them bohunks fade away, so as not to spoil the picnic; an' I am just advisin' knockin' their nuts together, so as they have somethin' to remember us by!"

"Bright, sensible scheme," commented Weston judiciously, "except for your last suggestion. We can't have any assault and battery, you know! Against the law!"

"Gosh, yes! The law!" exclaimed Hayes. "That reminds me. If we let them birds fly, wouldn't it be a crime or something? I mean defyin'—no, that ain't it—avoidin'—no, that don't sound right either! Wait a bit! I'm gettin' to it. Read it in a paper while ago." He brought the whole of his brainpowers, main body and reserves, to bear on this profound matter. "I've got it! Defeatin' the ends o' justice! That's the baby!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "That's what we'll be guilty of, if we let them go; an' you can't be a party to a deal like that, Wess, bein' a policeman!"

"You are off the rails, old son!" answered Weston easily. "This matter has never been put into the hands of the police. I merely took a hand in the affair as a private individual, and not as a policeman. It is, therefore, up to Mr. Morgan to take any steps which he considers proper. If he decides to let them go, well —that ends the matter!"

Hiram J. looked relieved; but Hayes was only half convinced.

"Gosh, I suppose you know what's what, all right! But it hurts like hell to think o' them bohunks bein' able to give us the ha-ha, after havin' slipped us a bum steer like they have!" sighed Hayes, regret and disappointment in his voice.

"Say not so, Jim!" remarked Weston softly. "You know the old proverb: 'Our sins always find us out.' Plenty of bottom to that wheeze. And by that token, I think you may safely assume that retribution will overtake them sometime!"

"Say! What's re— re— well what you just said? He is a new one on me. I wish you wouldn't always use them high-falutin' furrin words, Wess!" complained Hayes, who considered polysyllables a blot on the English language.

"Retribution simply means getting it in the neck," answered Weston with a grin. "If you start something you can't handle, you generally get it in the neck sooner or later! And something tells me that those fellows won't form the exception to the rule!"

Hayes looked suspiciously at the sergeant.

"Say! You are up to somethin', Wess! You look too dam' pleased with yourself. I am on to you, Steve! Give us a line on what you aim startin' with them two!"

"What on earth are you talking about, Jim?" inquired Weston mildly with raised eyebrows. "You are jumping to conclusions, old son! I . . ."

"Aw, come off that horse, Wess!" interrupted Hayes. "Be a pal, an' let me in on the pro-gramme!"

"Oh, well! If you put it that way! I am going to escort the gentlemen back to their camp in person, and see that they clear out. And as one of them hinted to me that they could knock the stuffing out of me provided their limbs were free and in working order, it is possible—just possible, mind you—that during our trip, I may give them an opportunity of proving that statement."

Hayes slapped his knee, howling with glee.

"I knew it! I get you, Steve!" he shouted, gloatingly rubbing his hands together. "I knew you was goin' to slip somethin' acrost! Ain't he the candy

kid, Mr. Morgan? There ain't no flies on ol' Wess, I'll tell the world! "

Mr. Morgan, who had formed a silent audience to the preceding dialogue, looked puzzled.

"I can't quite see what you are driving at, Jim," he remarked.

"Can't you see? Ol' Wess is goin' to fight them two bohunks; an' he won't do a thing to them! Oh no! Not him!" And Hayes' merriment bubbled over again.

"Is he telling the truth, Sergeant?" queried Hiram J., highly interested.

"It may come true," answered Weston non-committally. "As those ruffians hinted that they could wipe me off the map if given a fair chance, I think it only right and proper to give them an opportunity. I have got a very obliging disposition that way!"

Hiram J. commenced to speak excitedly:

"Say, what's wrong with me attending the obsequies as rubberneck Joe, the pop-eyed marvel, and . . ." He suddenly interrupted himself, and threw a quick, startled glance over his shoulder towards the opening of the tent. He had become keenly aware that, in his eagerness, he had allowed himself to suffer a serious lingual lapse, and that, should his daughter have happened to overhear it, retribution would be swift and uncompromising! But to his relief he discovered the coast to be clear, and he resumed his discourse in a more stately vein. "I mean," he said with quiet dignity, "that, as I am an interested party, I should like to see how you deal with those ruffians, Sergeant!"

"You are welcome to come along, both of you," grinned the sergeant, "if you insist on becoming accessories before, during, and after the fact. But I'll warn you, Mr. Morgan, that if you attend this love-feast, you may have to appear in court after all. They may charge me with assault and battery, you know!"

"I'll take a chance!" cried Hiram J. boyishly. "I guess it'll be worth it!"

An hour afterwards the council, having decided their

course of action, and having disposed of some attendant matters, rose, and in a body went to interview the prisoners. These were lined up near the tents of the camp crew, and the sergeant addressed them:

"Look here, you! Mr. Morgan has decided that he will not prosecute any of you!"

The late Kidnapping Syndicate stared at him in speechless astonishment, almost unable to believe their own ears! Moiese and Bernard, on the other hand, kept themselves well in hand. It was against their code to betray any sentiment.

Slippery, though badly shaken, soon recovered speech.

"Youse mean to say, you's going to let us leg it without running us in?" he inquired.

"You have with commendable acumen put your finger on the exact hub of the matter," answered Weston.

"Say, that's damned handsome, I'll tell the world!" muttered Slippery, his voice husky with emotion.

"Not at all!" remarked Weston pleasantly.

Hayes snickered, and Hiram J. turned his face away to hide a grin. They were both wondering if Slippery would endorse his sentiments of gratification in, say, a couple of hours' time or so from now. . . .

"Now listen carefully!" continued the sergeant. "You fellows will proceed to your camp; pack your outfit; and make tracks for the bright lights of Broadway as fast as you can go! If you are not well on your way by to-morrow morning, you will be run in for good! And to prevent any misunderstandings in the future, I may add that any undue lingering in Portage Bend will be discouraged. You may have noticed a canoe that pulled out from here a little while ago manned by two stout and hefty half-breeds. Well, that canoe was heading straight for Portage Bend, and the crew carried with them a letter for the officer commanding the Mounted Police Detachment down there, informing him of the arrival of your little party, and further of your little peccadillos up here. So my advice is: don't linger! You will also be watched till you are well on your way, so don't delude yourselves

into further rash ventures. Your arsenal was also included in the cargo of yon canoe . . ."

"Say! What-cha-mean? Have you copped our guns and rifles?" broke in Joe truculently.

"You guessed it!" answered Weston briefly.

"Say! Lemme tell you somethin'. Youse can't play fast an' loose with our property like that! You can't cop a fellow's belongings like that without getting yourself into trouble! It's plain theft, that's what dat is!" Joe was getting aggressive.

"Oh, shut up; or I may still persuade Mr. Morgan to change his mind!"

"But, say! How's we going to defend ourselves on the trip down without no guns?" continued Joe, tackling the matter from another angle.

"Nobody will attack you! There are no desperate characters up here, once you have taken your departure!" answered Weston tactlessly. "And even if the improbable should happen, I am convinced that your countrymen would hardly consider your loss a national disaster!" A remark which stung Joe and Slippery by its unparalleled callousness. "Anyhow," continued the sergeant, "if you once more interrupt my flow of wisdom I'll gag you! As I was saying, your guns, etcetera, have been forwarded to Portage Bend and will be restored to you on arrival—minus ammunition. To prevent you from giving a garbled version of the affair to your employers, I have much pleasure in informing you that you will have the satisfaction of reading a true and unvarnished account of your activities up here in the New York newspapers on your arrival. Mr. Morgan forwarded to certain editors all details, even to copies of the documents you so thoughtfully forwarded to him; and all this will be printed. That epic is also now on its way to Portage Bend!"

These words shook the Syndicate to the core! This would get Schinky's goat, and then some! And would queer them with him for good and always. Of all the double-crossing, dirty deals they had ever heard of in their natural, this sure about took the cake! Gosh! This would mean that they would have to give New

York a wide berth. They didn't dare face Schinky after he had had a peep at those newspapers. The deal was sure raw, and decidedly not to the good!

"The prospect of seeing your adventures perpetuated in print does not seem to cause you unbounded satisfaction," continued Weston, who had noticed the expression of dismay on their faces. "Well, there is no accounting for tastes. Personally, I expected that you would by now be humming gaily to yourselves for joy. That is about all, I think, as far as you two are concerned.

"Now, Moiese and Bernard, lend me your ears! When you return to Portage Bend walk warily, and try to keep to the path of righteousness as much as possible. A fatherly eye will be kept on you from now on! And, before all, try to show more care and discretion in your choice of associates in the future!" To avoid any misinterpretation, he obligingly translated his sage counsel and advice into Cree.

By this time the proceedings had commenced to pall on Joe. Standing up with his arms trussed to his sides was not conducive of brightening the outlook on life of a man who already contemplated existence with ultra jaundiced eyes. And then having to listen to that cop shouting his head off, on top of his other tribulations . . .

"Say!" he remarked. "You talk a helluva lot! Can't you turn them gasworks of yours off, so as we can get down to cases?"

"Does this little chat bore you?" inquired Weston courteously and solicitously. "I am sorry! I like to hear the sentences flow smoothly from my tongue. Call it a young man's weakness, if you like; but bear up with me for a few more moments and I shall have done! I just want to add to my other remarks, that my trusted friend Angus MacKenzie, accompanied by a friend of his—both of them incorruptible, and particularly accurate marksmen—will accompany you on your return trip for a few days, to see that you don't linger or err from the prescribed path. You may have noticed recently, that Angus is a rather high-strung individual, on whom sudden unauthorized and injudicious move-

ments have a startling effect; and when Angus is startled, his rifle invariably goes 'Bang!' So what I mean to say is that it would be advisable for you to keep as quiet as possible to avoid deplorable accidents! Much as I dislike violence and bloodshed, I have given the two gentlemen definite orders to open fire on you at the first suspicious move on your part. Now just one piece of advice. For the future stick to your legitimate walk in life such as sand-bagging, sneak-thieving and the like. This kidnapping-prospect here in the wilds was doomed to failure from the start. You were out of your element, out of your proper niche, so to say, up here. But even so, I hope that your experiences up here will cause you to return to your native hearth, broader and better crooks! That's all. Thank you so much! This little chat has been an unqualified pleasure to me. I have seldom had such an appreciative and attentive audience. We shall now proceed to the canoes and depart!"

As they wandered down to the canoes Hiram J. whispered to Jim Hayes:

"Look here, Jim. Is the sergeant always so loquacious?"

"Come again," said Jim, puzzled. "That one went a bit wide."

"I mean, does he always talk so much?"

"He sure does when he is feelin' good, an' is aimin' to slip something across somebody," grinned Hayes. "It always means trouble for someone when ol' Wess gets chatty. The meaner the stunt is they have pulled off, the smoother he gets. And, o' course, the misguided bohunks shake hands with themselves, and think he's a dude fool, who's full o' gas an' wind, whom they can hornswaggle any way they like! An' when he then cuts loose—oh, baby! Them bohunks sure get rattled! But when there is a real job on, he's sure different. Cold as ice, he is, an' he spits his orders out like shots crackin' from a gun! He sure don't waste his words then. Well, you may have noticed it yourself. He is a great lad all right!"

Hiram J. was in hearty agreement with the last sentiment. He had come to like the sergeant very

much, though he remained a bit of a puzzle to him. Weston appeared to be such a curious mixture of seeming contradictions according to Hiram J.'s views. For instance, here was the sergeant, who in many ways bore a strong resemblance to those young fellows he had seen hanging around his daughter in New York by the score; fellows who seemed to be made from a pattern, and whose chief functions and ambitions in life apparently were to say pretty things, dance well, live scrupulously up to the established and recognized standards of Society, and dress correctly and well! Of course, during his acquaintance with Weston, Hiram J. had never seen him in anything but his well-worn and none too respectable tweeds; but there was a something about the sergeant which convinced Hiram J. that he would not have found it in any way incongruous to meet Weston in a morning coat and top hat, taking his constitutional in Central Park. But here the similarity between Weston and those New York gentlemen—whom Hiram J. somewhat contemptuously termed lounge lizards behind his daughter's back—ceased.

Judging by what he had seen of the young props of Society Hiram J. felt convinced that they would not dream of facing a drizzling outer world without being adequately equipped with umbrella, raincoat and galoshes; and even so they would probably sally forth in a taxi to fool the inclement weather. And if they encountered any trouble on their way they would discreetly, in well-bred horror, carefully sidestep and circumvent, so as not to have their orderly and complacent existence brought out of its normal balance by being dragged into the vortex of common strife!

And on the other hand, here was Weston, who was seemingly of the same type, but who faced the world with cheer and general goodwill if it poured; who met trouble half-way with serene self-reliance and confidence; and who smashed his way along in spite of devil and high water! He had discovered traces about the sergeant of a latent power, firmness and indomitable will; and if Hayes' stories had been authentic there must further be concealed behind that suave,

easy, almost lackadaisical, exterior an almost incisive ferociousness. All in all, Hiram J. decided that the sergeant was not a man to rouse; and he began to feel a certain amount of pity for those who had been guilty of that indiscretion.

Arrived at the jetty a procession of canoes was formed. First came Angus and his incorruptible friend in one canoe, leading the way in accordance with certain explicit instructions from Weston. Next came Messrs. Joe and Slippery in their canoe manned by Moiese and Bernard, who were moody and sulky owing to some undefined forebodings. Then followed Weston in his canoe; and the rear was brought up by Hiram J. and Hayes in one canoe.

The flotilla presented an imposing spectacle to Mrs. and Miss Morgan, who were watching the exodus from the summer-house on the hill. It vaguely reminded them of a Venetian carnival. Not having any inkling to the events of the last few hours, they were speculating on the probable significance of this carnival; but their joint surmises fell far short of the actual truth.

In the meantime the flotilla pushed its way northwards along the eastern shore for a few miles. Then the leading canoe turned into a bay not far from the one in which Miss Morgan had been captured on the previous day.

The canoes were beached, and the occupants climbed out. Joe and Slippery, who still had their arms bound, principally because Weston considered it a fitting punishment for threatening to truss up Miss Morgan, were under protest lifted out of their canoe. They had wanted to know what it was all about before they stirred; but on a few terse commands from the sergeant to Moiese and Bernard they were quickly scooped out and deposited on the sand, without having their thirst for information satisfied. Bernard and Moiese, who had seen the fading of the lucrative payroll, had decided that their hope for the future lay with the conquerors; and they guided their actions accordingly.

The sergeant led the way to a clearing amongst the

timbers, not far from the beach. He had discovered this spot during one of his rambles with Miss Morgan; and even then it had mentally commended itself to him as an ideal place for an out-door ring with its level, hard floor covered with short, smooth grass. And as soon as he had decided on his course of action towards the delinquents, this spot had at once occurred to him.

Arrived in the clearing Weston called a halt, and ordered that the bonds of the prisoners be removed.

"Now," he said as soon as the operation had been performed, "as soon as you two fellows have got the circulation back in your arms you are going to fight me! You," he said, directed to Joe, "expressed the view yesterday that I would not be so chirpy—that was your sweet expression, I think—if you and your friend had your arms free. Well, here is your chance of proving the extent of my chirpiness! Of course, I intend to take you both on at the same time."

Slippery stared at the speaker, aghast! So that was it! That Coney Island affair all over again! Gosh, no! Anything but that, as long as he was conscious! But Joe took the proposition with more equanimity. He had in his day served an apprenticeship in a New York gang, and had on occasions taken a hand when feelings between his own and some rival gang had been running high, so he had something like a nodding acquaintance with turbulence. He frankly admitted to himself, however, that a fight was more to the good if one had the reassuring feel of black-jack and automatic in one's hand, and when one had friendly street-corners and sheltered doorways close to hand in case the frolics got too fast and furious; but one couldn't have everything in this world! But there was the recompense that there was nothing to suggest aggressiveness, pugnacity, truculency or any other characteristic of the bruiser in the sergeant as far as he could see; and besides, he had Slippery as his staunch co-worker and ally; so he was willing to tell the world that by their joint efforts they'd sure be able to fix that dude policeman's clock!

"Say! I ain't gonna fight you, nor nobody else!"

exclaimed Slippery, who had by now marshalled his thoughts "I ain't no fighting man!"

But Slippery's last statement was slightly equivocal. He had fought on several occasions, nor was he adverse to fighting if it was his kind of a fight! And his firmly-rooted conception of personal combat was to approach his adversary—who as yet was unaware of filling that billet—cautiously from the south, grasping a trusty black-jack firmly in his fist, when the aforementioned antagonist was heading north. Then, at the psychological moment, he would rush to the attack with verve and dash; the black-jack would be brought into action; and Slippery would stand a proud. unquestioned victor! Now, there was sense in that kind of fight! It did not mean trouble and inconvenience to more than one of the contestants, and that one was not the aggressor. And where was the sense in starting a fight if there were chances that the upshot might be disagreeable and incommodious to oneself? No, sir! No other kind of fight for me! thought Slippery.

But the sergeant evidently differed from Slippery. He contemplated him coldly, and quoth indifferently:

"Oh, well. If you have not been a fighting man heretofore, here commences the first lesson! Of course, if you don't want to fight me jointly, I'll take you one by one and treat you each in turn to a good sound hiding! I leave the choice entirely to yourselves!"

Slippery was eager and willing to continue the argument in favour of peace and goodwill on earth; but Joe cut him short by growling in his ear:

"Close your mug, Slippery! Can't you see that he is only a long string-bean of a dude? Me an' you between us'll sure make hash out o' him in no time. So shut up!

"We'll go you, all right!" he continued, turning to the sergeant. "We ain't aiming to let you out o' your contract, so don't you worry!" And his features contracted into an ugly sneer.

"Your solicitude in shielding me from worry touches me," said the sergeant courteously. "Well,

get the cramp out of your arms and give me the word when you are ready for business."

Having uttered these kind words he seated himself on the ground, where he was joined by Hayes and Hiram J. Weston and Hayes kept up an unconcerned, easy conversation, while Hiram J. sat in silent ecstasy, awaiting the anticipated treat.

The half-breeds were standing stoically about. They had aggregated into two sharply defined groups. One consisted of Bernard and Moiese, who were under a cloud; the unblemished formed the other.

Joe dragged his unwilling partner in the forthcoming tournament with him, in spite of the latter's protestations and advocations of coming to some compromise with the other part; but Joe would have no further palavering. As he distinctly pointed out to Slippery: "It's better to give that string-bean hell between us than having 'im lambast us singly!" And Slippery, regretfully, had to admit the force and logic of the argument.

The two walked up and down the clearing swinging their arms about like two energetic windmills; though a keen critic may have contended that Slippery's whole heart was not in the exercises. During the limbering-up process Joe whispered sage counsel and advice into Slippery's ears anent the tactics to be adopted in the coming fray. He instructed Slippery to make a joint rush with him towards the enemy as soon as the hostilities opened—or before if they got a chance—and then Joe would attack their surprised adversary on the left flank, Slippery simultaneously engaging the right flank; and before their startled opponent would have time to recover from his surprise they should be able to get in some good, useful work! His further advice to try and get in some healthy kicks was vetoed by Slippery, who pointed out to Joe the fact that they only wore moccasins on their feet, and that a kick with a foot encased in moccasin was likely to act as a kind of a boomerang! Joe found the point well taken, and regretfully counterordered the pedal operations.

In the meantime the arm-flexing operation went

forward, and Slippery, for his part, was quite agreeable and content to let it go on for ever; but Joe was not in agreement.

"Say! I guess our arms are about jake now," he presently remarked to Slippery. "Don't you think so?"

Slippery, who was inclined to temporize, hedge and generally postpone the evil moment of action, suggested a further stretch of arm-swinging. But Joe, who had commenced to feel the fatiguing strain of the preliminaries, decided otherwise.

"Aw, come on, Slippery! We can't keep on so long that that guy thinks he's got us scared. The sooner we get started, the sooner we'll knock the stuffing out of that string bean!"

Slippery, his arguments exhausted, reluctantly and lugubriously agreed to let matters take their course.

"All right! We are ready, an' waiting!" promptly shouted Joe to the sergeant, afraid that Slippery might develop a change of heart.

"Good!" said Weston, getting up and shedding his coat; Hiram J. and Hayes rising with him.

He walked lightly forward towards the pair, and when he was some seven paces away from them he stopped and said:

"Well, I'm . . ."

At that moment Joe and Slippery rushed. But Weston had been prepared for some such move, and his keen eyes had discovered their first movement while still in embryo. He promptly plagiarized Joe's tactics and flung himself at the charging couple, to the utter confusion of their plans. Both Joe and Slippery were primed to the movements to be adopted when reaching their objective; but when that objective is encountered half-way to its assumed whereabout with no time to adjust the error, things are liable to go wrong. And things did! Weston's left fist caught Joe neatly on the solar plexus, while his right connected with Slippery's chin. This last was not a particularly well directed blow, but it caused Slippery to stumble backwards and sit down on the ground; firmly decided in his mind that the battle was over as

far as he was concerned, and that from now on he would assume the rôle of Nebuchadnezzar. Joe in the meantime was standing doubled up, snapping for breath, while Weston lightly skipped back a few paces, awaiting the further developments. Little by little Joe regained his wind. He straightened up and saw the sergeant warily watching him. With a snarl of rage he sprang forward, his arms going like busy flails. But to his utter surprise he found that his fists never appeared to find the sergeant. The latter never seemed to be where in the face of Joe's judgment he ought to be; and this enraged Joe the more, and roused him to further frenzy. But at the same time he noticed that there did not seem to be much force behind the sergeant's return punches; and in a more than usually lucid interval it dawned on him that the sergeant seemed to confine himself to dodging his blows, while he quitted with mere love-taps. "Gosh, he's scared of me!" was Joe's complacent view of the situation. And the idea gave him more confidence. Once as he jumped back to try regain some urgently needed breath, he discovered his hotspur partner still taking his ease on the ground.

"Get up, Slippery!" he panted, "and come into this! If you don't I'll start on you myself!"

"And quite right and proper too!" interpolated Weston with a grin. "I'll suspend hostilities till that gentleman can resume his interrupted activities!"

In face of this development there was nothing for the hapless Slippery to do but reluctantly scramble to his feet and line up alongside his partner.

"Now, Slippery, show some pep when we rush him again!" growled Joe, again going into action with flails working well.

But again the sergeant met the rush half-way, and this time he caught Joe neatly on the chin. Joe toppled over backwards, and as Slippery had adopted some private tactics of his own, the outstanding feature of which was to do his fighting from behind Joe's back, Joe landed squarely on him in his fall, and both crashed over backwards to the ground. Slippery, who served as buffer for Joe, had the wind completely

knocked out of him, and he lay gasping like a fish out of water when Joe rolled clear.

This performance provoked a roar of laughter from the white members of the audience; while even the breeds showed unwonted indications of ill-concealed merriment. Hiram J. in his excitement made a backwards leap across the gulf which separated him from his abandoned and unregenerate youth, and he danced about shouting his appreciation to the sergeant in the half-forgotten vernacular of bygone days:

"Atta, boy! 'At's the stuff to give 'em! Knock their nuts off! Soak it to 'em!"

The sergeant watched the human tangle on the ground with a grim smile.

"Now, up you get!" he encouraged. "We haven't started properly yet!"

But Slippery was through. No matter what happened, he was out of it for good! That was flat! And to add some colour to the picture he intended to represent of a man utterly wrecked, damaged and in distress, he moaned softly while he kept his eyes tightly closed. But Joe, his fighting blood stirred, got to his feet, stood for a few moments to steady himself and clear his brains, and, then, with a bellow of rage he sprang for the sergeant again.

The same performance as before repeated itself. Joe had the same uncanny feeling of fighting an elusive phantom; but at the same time his conviction of the absence of hitting power in the sergeant grew more pronounced, and gave more strength to his supposition that Weston was divulging a yellow streak. "Well, I'll show him!" thought Joe, and exerted himself to get to closer grips with his opponent. And even Hiram J., who had calmed down to become once more an observant spectator, noticed the lack of aggressiveness on the sergeant's part, and voiced his observation to Hayes:

"Say! It doesn't seem to me as if there is any pep to Weston's punches! He only seems to be dancing about and dodging the other guy!"

"Just wait!" counselled Hayes, who was watching the gladiators with the benevolent indulgence of a

proud father watching his offspring having a romp. "Wess is just playin' with him. He'll cut loose any minute now!"

And even as he spoke things began to happen. Joe had by now forgotten Slippery's existence, and had come to view the affair as a personal matter between him and the sergeant. But he had begun to discover that the breathing spaces were getting infrequent if not wholly absent, and consequently he was commencing to experience a paucity of breath which was becoming embarrassing. He therefore decided to force the issue by some determined rushes and some close-in fighting. He flung himself with vim at the sergeant, firm in his sanguine belief that the sergeant's punches would not hurt or incommode him anything to speak of; but he suffered a cruel disillusion! Instead of dodging, the sergeant held his ground firmly, neatly parried Joe's blows, and got in some of his own, which convinced Joe to his consternation that there was some brawn and muscle hidden away somewhere about his adversary! Joe promptly jumped back; but this time the sergeant followed him, and inexorably the smashing blows continued to rain down over the unfortunate Joe. He tried to parry and dodge; but twist as he would he could not avoid that merciless shower of blows. Whatever he did, and wherever he turned, the sergeant and his fists seemed to be all over him. Weston's face had lost its appearance of easy good nature, and was stern and cold. Nimbly he jumped after the twisting and doubling Joe, each of his blows resounding in the clearing.

Hiram J. grew frantic. He was hopping about shouting at the top of his voice:

"Atta, boy! Soak him, Wess! Punch in his dial so as he swallers his back teeth! Soak his smeller, so's the holes point the wrong way!" and diverse other neat and elegant figures of speech which he had long ago forgotten, but which now came back to him with a rush.

The end soon came. Weston made a rush at the gasping and floundering Joe; his left fist shot out to

Joe's solar plexus; Joe with a gasp lowered both hands to the outraged point; and at the same time Weston's right shot out and hit Joe's chin a crack, which roused startled echoes in the surrounding wood. Joe's whole body was lifted from the ground by the impact, and he crashed backwards to the ground where he lay still; oblivious of the world and all its doings!

Weston stood contemplating his late antagonist for a few minutes. A hush had fallen over the clearing, and even Hiram J. had ceased to bubble. Slippery, who had watched the latter part of the fight from his strategical position on the ground, grew as pale as his orange-hued visage permitted, and he muttered an awed "Gosh!" as Joe's body joined him on the grass.

As soon as the sergeant was convinced that the fighting edge had definitely been taken out of Joe, he turned to Slippery:

"Now, you little runt! Up you get and take your medicine!"

But Slippery protested energetically, almost with tears in his eyes, against this suggestion.

As all cajoling and entreating proved to be in vain, Weston lost his temper.

"You damned little coward!" he cried. "I'll teach you what it means to kidnap innocent, defenceless girls, and to leave your pal to fight your battles for you!"

With those words he flung himself bodily on top of Slippery, turned him over on his stomach, and straddled his back, his face towards Slippery's heels; and with his two hands and hearty goodwill he commenced to belabour that part of Slippery's anatomy which is normally used for filling a chair. Slippery immediately started to voice his protest in lusty yells! Never had he considered it possible that the palm of a hand could be so hard! He tried to wriggle away; but found that he was firmly pinned under the sergeant's body. And as a fit accompaniment to his yells of distress came the rhythmical "Slap! Slap!" from Weston's hands.

Again the audience was stirred into uproarious

hilarity; and even the breeds threw to the wind the last vestige of their racial dignity and cackled like geese!

At last Weston had to give in. His arms were aching and his hands tingling, and he felt that a continuation of his pastime would be more distressing to himself than to the victim. He got up from his perch on Slippery's squirming body; leaving that gentleman lying on the ground, sobbing and sniffing from pain, humiliation and hurt vanity.

"Moiese! Fetch some water in your hat and douse this fellow!" ordered Weston, indicating Joe, who had commenced to stir, and who was moaning gently.

Moiese departed for the lake on the double, and returned in a few moments. He dashed the contents of his hat into Joe's face; and soon the latter was able to sit up with a dazed, vacant expression on his face.

Decorum now once more reigned amongst the audience.

Weston, still grim and stern, directed Angus and his friend as well as Moiese and Bernard to help the fallen gladiators to their canoe, and push off with them at once. He let them depart without further injunctions or advice. He considered that recent events had been so thoroughly instructive and comprehensive, that further moralizing would be utterly unnecessary.

As the sorry procession took its departure he stepped over to where the frankly grinning Hiram J. and Hayes was standing, and reciprocating their grins he picked up his coat and donned it.

"Gee!" exclaimed Hiram J. "You are sure some li'l bruiser, I'll tell the world! You soaked them and then some! I ain't had such a time of all right since I was a kid!"

But suddenly, now when the exhilaration of the first excitement had somewhat waned, it dawned on Hiram J. that he had been straying into forbidden pastures, and had been allowing himself more latitude in speech and address than was consistent with his position in the world. And with the realization he promptly checked his further mad career towards degeneration, and nimbly recrossed the gulf back to the firm soil

where he once more became Hiram J. Morgan, the millionaire.

"I mean to say, it was a most gratifying sight to see how efficiently you dealt with those odious ruffians!" he continued, with a dignity almost amounting to pompousness in his anxiety to re-establish his jeopardized prestige! And having by these dignified words wiped the slate clean, he accompanied Weston and Hayes down to the beach, where they watched Joe and Slippery depart in their canoe with the one manned by Angus and his brother guardian in close attendance.

Thereupon they climbed into their own canoes and returned to Camp Morgan; Hiram J. mentally confiding to himself that it was the most enjoyable and satisfying outing he had experienced for many a day!

## CHAPTER XII

Following the sorrowful exit of Joe and Slippery things once more slid into the established grooves on Clear Water Lake.

Weston still manfully stuck to his self-appointed job; though there were times when he had the wistful hope that the Morgans would soon get tired of camping, and evacuate his domain. But Hiram J. seemed as enthusiastic and energetic as ever; Mrs. Morgan seemed to enjoy herself in her quiet way; and the daughter seemed quite resigned. So there was every probability that they might stick it out for so long that there would hardly be enough of his leave left to give him a worth-while chance to enjoy himself, mourned Weston in his darker moments. But one day something happened which altered the situation completely.

One evening Miss Morgan and he were returning from a fishing trip. Weston was in a more cheerful

mood than usual. The weather had been glorious all day, and seemed to have had a softening influence on his companion. She had been pleasant and gracious all day, had hardly displayed any of her usual superciliousness and aloof distance, and had at moments even shown signs of spontaneous gaiety. Even when the beauty of the day had enticed Weston to burst into one of his panegyrics of the country, she had answered quite complacently: "Yes, on a day like this it is really quite wonderful up here." Which qualified commendation made Weston reflect that there was still hope for the girl's regeneration; and made him contemplate the future with more cheerful equanimity.

The canoe was skimming smoothly along on the velvety surface of the lake. The sun had set, and the mysterious twilight of the northern summer night had commenced to lower itself over the darkening lake, around which the dark, solemn spruces stood like grave sentinels. Up from the north end came occasional weird cries from a loon, else the silence was only broken by the splash from some belated fish, and the swish of the paddle which Weston was wielding where he was kneeling in the stern of the light craft.

In the bow, facing him, his companion was sitting comfortably on some cushions, one hand trailing in the warm water. Even her usually haughty, almost austere, expression seemed to have softened, and her face appeared almost gentle in the mellow evening light.

They had been chatting easily and comfortably for some time, when Miss Morgan suddenly remarked:

"Oh, by the way, I am bringing my rifle along to-morrow evening when we go out fishing."

"Why?" asked Weston, surprised. "There are no deer anywhere around this lake. Or perhaps you are going to try picking off partridges with your rifle?" he added with a smile.

"Not at all. I am going to try to get a moose."

"You can't shoot a moose this time of the season,"

answered Weston easily. "The flavour of the meat is not at all palatable just now, and hardly fit for human consumption. Even the Indians scorn it as a diet this time of the year. If you feel a craving for wild meat, we'll take another trip up to Grassy Hills and get another deer."

"I am not thinking of meat," retorted Miss Morgan, a little scornfully. "I want to bring a moose-head back with me to New York. One I have shot myself. It shouldn't be a difficult matter to get within easy range of one when it is submerged in the water. We could spurt up quite closely to it with the canoe, while it is trying to clamber out."

"We could; but we won't," said Weston good-humouredly. "You see, the position is this: although the game-laws do not apply so far north, we have nevertheless an unwritten code up here which we all strictly follow. That is: not wantonly to kill any game. Game up here is only killed for food. And woe to the one who breaks that unwritten law. Although the law proper can't touch him, he will soon find that he has got everybody's hand against him; and that every door is closed to him. And he generally fades out of the country a sadder but wiser man."

"But you have been hunting deer yourself," protested Miss Morgan.

"Quite. But only for food. None of the meat from the deer we have shot has run to waste. And, besides, there is this difference between deer and moose. While the deer is not particularly fancied by the Indians, the moose is a kind of walking supply-depot to them. The meat is their staple diet for the winter; and from the hide they get materials for their moccasins, laces for their snow-shoes, and thongs for their portage-straps. And material for a lot of other things as well. And the sinews furnish them with thread for sewing moccasins. From the bones and antlers they fashion various utensils and ornaments; so you see, the moose has a special, exalted niche of its own in the scheme of existence up here. And, consequently, trespassers against that particular quad-

ruped are seriously frowned upon by the denizens of the north."

"That may all be very interesting," she retorted somewhat brusquely. "But it has really no bearing on the matter as far as I am concerned. I am quite determined to get that moose, even at the risk of annoying a few Indians."

"But really, it can't be done!" expostulated Weston. "You don't seem to get the point at all. Shooting a moose at this time of the season is considered an act several degrees lower than murder. And, besides, shooting a moose when it is helplessly foundered in the water is hardly a sporting proposition. So I am afraid you will have to forgo that intention."

Miss Morgan jerked her hand out of the water and sat up straight. She thought she had detected a shade of dictation in the sergeant's words; and it stung her. And her former gentleness evaporated as quickly and as tracelessly as a balloonful of hydrogen let loose in the atmosphere; and its former place was taken by an antagonistic annoyance.

"It seems to me that you are trying to issue orders to me," she said coldly, with considerable hauteur.

"I am not trying to do anything of the sort," averred Weston gravely, a little nettled by her tone. He ceased paddling and looked straight at her. "I am merely pointing out to you why it is impossible to carry out your somewhat unfortunate scheme. When in Rome do as the Romans do, you know. So the least one can do up here is to respect established customs and rules."

His companion's eyes commenced to sparkle ominously. It was not customary for her to have her wishes questioned or baulked. All her life she had been brought up to the conviction that her slightest desire was a law and command unto itself, which must be carried out promptly and unhesitatingly. And, consequently, Weston's attitude was beginning to vex her exceedingly.

"I am not a bit interested in the customs and rules of this country," she said uncompromisingly. "They

do not apply to me at all; nor do they impress me in any way. If people up here choose to become annoyed because I shoot one of their pet moose that is their business. And the prospect won't in any way influence my actions."

"You still haven't got me," explained Weston, determined to be patient. "The Indians imagine that they have a lot of grievances against the white people already, and that is the main reason why we try to step as carefully as possible, to avoid giving them further reasons for complaints. That is why I must seriously beg of you to let your project drop."

"What do I care for the dirty Indians and their grievances," cried Miss Morgan scornfully. "I am fully determined to get that head; and I am going to get it!"

"I am sorry," remarked Weston seriously. "The Indians and their grievances may, as you say, have nothing to do with you; but to us they are a great and important problem. And especially so to us members of the Police, who are, in a way, the guardians of the Indians. So not only my own convictions and sentiments in the matter, but also my duty prevents me from encouraging or participating in your plan."

"Oh, well. Since your conscience is so tender that it compels you to refuse a perfectly innocent and reasonable request, I'll get somebody else to help me," was her biting comment.

But Weston had by now begun to feel irritated at her stubbornness and her total disregard for the reasonable arguments he had advanced. He felt very strongly about the particular subject under discussion; and considered himself amply justified in trying to turn her from her purpose. He was also of the opinion that as a guest of the country the least she could do was to show proper respect and regard for its ethics and codes.

"I think you will find it rather difficult to find anybody who is willing to help you," he said a little shortly. "And when I point out to the members of

your party that I am not in favour of your scheme, I am afraid that you will find it quite impossible."

Miss Morgan glared at him, a flaming danger signal flashing out on each cheek. This was dictating to her with a vengeance! How dared that common policeman; that nobody; that obscure son of the wilderness (the last a somewhat incorrect and exaggerated statement; but then she was labouring under a heavy strain); how dared he dictate to her! The insult nearly took her breath away.

"How dare you issue orders about what I am or am not to do!" she exploded at last. "Or do you think that you have earned the right to constitute yourself arbiter of my actions because you have been of some slight service to me on occasions?" she ended with a sneer.

Weston stiffened, and his face hardened. The unprovoked, sneering taunt had stung him to the quick. But he managed to keep his welling anger in check.

"I don't think I have given you cause for that remark," he observed quietly, though his voice shook a little.

She felt the rebuke, and more, felt that it was deserved. And in the present state of her temper that only served to heighten her anger. Her annoyance developed into a hostile, unreasoning fury against the presumptuous policeman, who dared allow himself the enormous latitude of ruling her actions. Her self-esteem and vanity had received a shock almost staggering in its magnitude.

She had been too lax in her attitude towards the policeman, she argued. Had been too condescending and kind towards him. That had been her trouble! And this was the ghastly result of being decent to those kind of people. It was about time that he was set in his right place; made to realize their relative positions.

"Well, that is the only possible explanation I can find for your unparalleled rudeness and officiousness!" she stormed, apropos of Weston's remark. Her chin was in the air and her eyes flashed her

anger. "How dare you, a common policeman, issue high and mighty orders to a person in my position? You seem to have forgotten utterly that your position is merely that of a guide"—this was news to Weston; but the fact lost its prominence just then—"while you seem to consider yourself a kind of glorified leader and director of the whole party. It would be better if you tried to realize your position instead of trying to make yourself the judge of my actions. You will please remember for the future that if your advice is in any way desired, it will be asked for!"

Weston went hot all over, and the knuckles of his hands showed white as his grip tightened on the paddle he was holding. He was stirred to violent fury by the girl's words. He found her rebukes as undeserved as they had been unreasonable, and far exceeding his offence. He was not even quite able to understand where exactly his offence had lain. He had merely pointed out to her that shooting a moose at that particular time of the year was a thing that was not done; and as a reward for his timely advice this vindictive and abusive opprobrium had been hurled at his head.

He felt sorely tempted to fling back some sharp retort; but he managed to get himself under proper control before anything had slipped out which might have caused him future regret and self-reproach.

"Very well. I shall not offend again," he said with quiet dignity.

Miss Morgan glowered at him for a few moments as if half hoping that he would make some further remark which would give her an opportunity of unloading some more of her spleen; but when he in silence commenced paddling again, she turned her face away, and sat gazing fixedly out on the lake. She wished she could have turned her back on her companion; but one cannot fling oneself recklessly about in a canoe. So she had to forgo that effective demonstration, to her vast regret.

So the miserable journey continued in painful silence; and it was a relief to both when the canoe at

last turned into the bay, and nosed alongside the jetty.

They both derived immense satisfaction from seeing one of the half-breeds lounging near the landing-place, and who came to their assistance, or else the situation might have become a little awkward.

The breed helped Miss Morgan out, lifted out the cushions and fishing-tackle; and with a curt "Good night!" she marched off towards the tents.

Weston half mechanically had removed his hat, and had echoed her "Good night!" Now he jammed his hat on his head, grabbed the paddle, and pushed the canoe away from the jetty, heading it towards the lake and his island home.

He dug the paddle viciously into the water, and the canoe skimmed along like a startled marsh hen. He was in a white heat of rage. It was not so much Miss Morgan's words as the way in which they had been uttered which had aroused his fury. She had reproved him as if he had been a dustman who had dared question the actions of his queen. And all because he had merely given her some sound and essentially necessary advice! Anyhow, he had got comprehensive and unequivocal information on her valuation of himself. Evidently she regarded him as a kind of retainer only a shade above the breeds in as far as his services were voluntary and unsalaried. She must be thoroughly, hopelessly spoilt; a selfish, unmitigated snob; a . . . But here he checked further unkind characteristics of Miss Morgan which were crowding his tongue as he suddenly realized that, after all, he was thinking of a lady. But the vicious "splash! splash!" of his paddle served as a kind of dash for the sentiments he did not consider seemly of utterance.

"A common policeman!" he mimicked. Splash! Splash!

"It would be better for you if you tried to realize your position!" Splash! Splash!

In this mood he continued more than half-way to the island, his paddle wreaking his wrath on the inoffensive and innocent lake.

But gradually the violent exertion commenced to take the sharp edge out of his fury, and he was able to review the situation more dispassionately.

What a temper that girl possessed, he thought. If she could fly off the handle so completely at a difference of opinion over such a small and insignificant matter as the shooting or non-shooting of a moose, what would then her attitude be if really important matters were involved in a debate? He shivered slightly at the contemplation of the probable exhibition.

One thing was certain, he assured himself, he would give her a wide berth for the future, so as not to run the risk of being exposed to further indignities.

At this point in his profound meditations a thought struck him which made him sit up, aghast. He would have to clear out of here! The thought shook him and filled him with fierce revolt; but the more he pondered the situation the more obviously essential did that course appear. He could not possibly face the girl after the tongue-lashing she had given him. And to drift around on his lonesome with the prospect of an accidental meeting perpetually before him would be just as unpalatable.

"Damn!" he swore fervently under his breath as the full significance of the situation sank further in. It was too late now to go and find some other place for camping. The only course open was to return to Portage Bend, and then try to make the best of what was still left over from the wreck of his holidays.

And in a saddened and sobered mood he at last arrived at his island and headed into the lagoon. He let the canoe drift for a few moments while he looked about him. The little tree-covered island lay so quietly and invitingly there. Just abreast of him was the little park which surrounded his camp, and a thin wreath of smoke, curling up from the chimney, signified that Angus was at home. It all looked so neat and tempting in the soft light of the peaceful summer night; and now he had to leave it all. Why had these people necessarily picked on Clear Water

Lake when they had all the rest of the north-west to choose from?

"Damn women!" he muttered impolitely, unconsciously plagiarizing the late lamented Slippery, as he dug his paddle into the water and drove the canoe up on the beach.

On entering the living shack he found Angus seated cross-legged on the floor in front of the hearth, in which a small but cheery fire was burning. Angus was essentially addicted to home comforts when they offered, and he considered a fire, regardless of temperature, as being in that category.

Angus looked up quickly when Weston entered.

"Back?" he inquired unnecessarily.

"Back," admitted Weston, dragging a chair up to the fire. "Get the bottle, Angus. We'll have a peg. There's a good boy."

Angus scrambled to his feet with alacrity. This was the kind of commission he appreciated.

Soon they each had a mug ready to hand. Angus watched Weston with surreptitious curiosity. He sensed something to be wrong somewhere. First there was this early return, which was unprecedented when Weston had been out fishing with Miss Morgan; and then Weston's brooding air as he was sitting staring into the fire, puffing spasmodically on his pipe. Yes, circumstantial evidence decidedly pointed towards something having shaken loose somewhere. But as it was against his code to try wheedle information out of his friends, when information was not freely offered, he kept his peace.

Presently Weston roused himself.

"Listen, Angus. We are going to pull our stakes to-morrow morning early and return to the Bend," he said shortly.

"Huh?" ejaculated Angus, startled into unconcealed amazement for once.

"I said we'll pull out to-morrow for the Bend. We'll pile all our spare stuff into the shacks and nail them up. Perhaps somebody at the Bend will want to borrow the place for the fall hunting. Anyhow, the provisions may come in handy for some trapper or

someone, who is short of grub, next winter. You had better turn in early, as I want to get an early start!" He spoke in short, snappy sentences, continuing to gaze half abstractedly into the fire.

Angus, having got over his surprise, pondered for a while.

"Heem girl at camp give you cold shoulder?" he inquired suddenly.

Weston's face tightened, and he half turned in his chair. But the intended rebuke for Angus's tactless query remained unuttered. He realized in time that Angus had merely voiced the conclusion of his mental speculations on an incomprehensible and murky situation; and that his remark was not in any way meant as vulgar or impertinent curiosity.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Angus!" was therefore his only comment, as he turned his eyes back to the fire.

"I see she has!" muttered Angus, continuing the line of his logic. "Me go to bed now, an' then be fresh bright an' early to-morrow."

So saying he finished the contents of his mug, and turned towards his bunk.

But for a while longer the sergeant remained seated in front of the fire, the flickering flames illuminating his moody face with sharper light as the dusk in the shack deepened, while he brooded over his shipwrecked plans and his rotten luck. . . .

About four o'clock in the morning the preparations for the exodus were commenced; and the work progressed rapidly. They had both had vast experience at this kind of thing, and knew at a glance what was wanted, what could be left, and where to put the things to be cached.

At five o'clock Weston took a canoe and slipped across to Camp Morgan. He did not relish the idea of slipping away like a thief in the night, but at the same time he had an unconquerable aversion to facing the Morgans; and so he decided to temporize between the two alternatives by apprising Hayes of his intention to depart, and leave him to convey his adieux to the Morgans.

He found Hayes in his tent, eating breakfast.

"Hello, Wess!" grinned Hayes his welcome. "You are sure bright an' early this mornin'! Sit down an' have a cup o' coffee!"

"No, thank you. I haven't time to stay. I am pulling back to the Bend this morning. I have just remembered that there is something important I have to do down there in a few days. So please give my compliments to the Morgans, and tell them I was sorry to have to leave too early to say good-bye in person!"

Hayes stared at him in speechless astonishment, his fork, loaded with bacon, poised stationary half-way to his mouth.

"What the hell is all this?" he inquired as soon as his vocal chords were working again. "You pullin' stakes! What's up?"

"I told you I had something important to do. It is absolutely necessary for me to pull out. Now, I don't want to hear any queries, arguments or discussion!" said Weston with decision. "All I want you to do is to give my respects to the Morgans. You may tell them that I had a message calling me back to the Bend. You can say that those were my words, if it helps save your conscience from being burdened by a fib!" concluded Weston with a grin.

Hayes pondered for a while; but whatever the results were of his study he kept them strictly to himself.

"All right, Wess!" he said at last. "I'll give 'em your message. And don't worry none about my conscience. It can be kinder elastic at times!" he grinned. "Well, so long; an' remember me to all the boys. An' tell Connor that next time I strike town he'd better arrest me straight off the bat, if he wants to keep the full use of his optics!"

"I'll give him your kind message, Jim!" laughed Weston, relieved that the interview was over without any embarrassing and probing questions having been put by Hayes. "Well, be good, old-timer!"

The two men shook hands, whereupon Weston left the tent and strode toward his canoe.

Hayes went to the tent-opening and followed Weston with his eyes till he was well out on the lake; then he

shifted his gaze to the tent occupied by Miss Morgan, and quoth to himself:

"Well, young lady, I am willin' to stake my bottom dollar that you are the cause an' reason for all these mysterious happenings! How do I know, ma'am? 'Cause I ain't no fool, an' have got eyes in my head. You sure pile up the agony around you! But how Wess could fall for one like you beats me," he continued, his unjust suspicions about Weston as strong as ever. "Guess it's lack o' experience with skirts what's his trouble. I guess it would take more 'an a pretty face to make me start skiddin'," was the sanctimonious end of his self-communion. He stoutly chose to ignore the fact that not less than twice in his young life had he been cleaned out and left stranded by girls, whose chief and only assets had been appearances which had appealed to his particular artistic perception.

## CHAPTER XIII

Weston's unexpected appearance at Portage Bend a month before his leave was up created somewhat of a stir.

His comrades in the barrack-room evinced a frank curiosity and earnest inquisitiveness with regard to the phenomenon; but Weston had, on the trip down, prepared himself for just such a contingency, and parried all queries with barefaced evasions and equivocations. He vaguely intimated to his interlocutors that Clear Water Lake had become too crowded and public foı his retiring tastes, and, further, that he was not going to have all of his holidays spoiled by playing nurse and guardian angel to all the tenderfeet in the district. Whereupon he deftly switched the conversation by demanding news about his late friends Joe and Slippery.

"We had the pleasure of seeing this burg honoured by their presence," laughed Constable Connor. "I

was appointed reception committee and A.D.C. to the gentlemen during their stay here. They did look a miserable, sorry and sulky crew, and there was a perceptible coldness and estrangement between the couple. They bore signs of having mixed it on the way down. Or so we thought at first. But bringing our joint well-tried and superior intelligences to bear on the matter, it was unanimously moved, seconded and carried, that little Richard Weston hadn't been far away when they had suffered those damages to their manly beauty. Now, tell us all about it, Wess."

Weston grinned.

"Did they pull out at once?" he queried.

"They did! They went like lambs that have just escaped the clutches of the wolf. In fact, they were keen and eager to depart. I handed over to them their arsenal according to your instructions; put them on the train; and I could almost hear the sigh of relief that escaped them as the train pulled out. But to repeat myself, tell us all about it!"

Weston complied. He gave them a bare outline of the facts and circumstances relating to the occurrences on the lake; glad to steer the conversation away from embarrassing subjects. But the tale, as told by him, did not gain the unqualified approval of his hearers, and least that of Constable Bryan, the Canadian, who considered that a good story ought to be recounted with enough enumerations to preclude the hearer having to draw on his own imagination for missing details. He, therefore, considered it fit and proper to voice his objections.

"Gosh! You do tell a story good, Sergeant; I don't think!" he snorted his disgust. "You only missed a few 'whereats,' 'aforementioneds' and 'heretofores' to make it a regular Headquarters report. Holy mackerel! For a man as fond of shooting his mouth off like you are, you spin this yarn as well as a deaf and dumb mute with the lockjaw. Anyhow, I guess Jim Hayes won't be so niggardly with facts, elucidations and corroborative details when he returns, so you can politely go to the dickens and take your story with you!"

"Thank you for them kind sentiments," grinned Weston. "But to my sorrow I notice that my prediction anent the utter ruin of the discipline around this place has come true. However, a day of reckoning will come. But let that pass! Reverting to Hayes, though. He sends his love to everybody, and begged me to express his thanks for the hospitality you extended towards him last time he was in town. And he further sent the particular message to you, Connor, to arrest him as soon as he strikes town next time, and keep him locked up till he pulls out again. He hinted that such a course might save any more accidents to your visual organs."

They all laughed; and Weston left them to go and pay his respects to Inspector Trench.

But he left behind him in the barrack-room an atmosphere of surmise and conjecture. His vague explanations had not been accepted with the blind confidence and ingenuous faith he had fondly anticipated. His late audience sensed something fishy about the situation, and they started voicing their suspicions.

"I'll bet it's that girl!" quoth Corporal Wilson, having given the matter due and deliberate consideration.

"'Course it is!" averred Bryan, whose view on the subject was not exactly unbiassed. "'Course she has got the sergeant's goat and he has beaten it. She appeared to me like the kind of dame who wouldn't be particular about what she said, why she said it, or who she said it to! And I guess she has said it to the sergeant."

This lucid and comprehensive summing-up of the situation was accepted by the other two with affirmative grunts; whereupon it was decided to adjourn the inquiry until Jim Hayes' evidence could be obtained.

In the meantime the unconscious object of their inquiry had presented himself before the inspector.

"Hallo, Sergeant!" had been that gentleman's surprised greeting on seeing his right-hand man enter. "Back again already? Did you get fed up with the Great Alone, or did the Morgans crowd you out?"

"Oh, the place was commencing to become a little

monotonous," lied Weston stoutly and deliberately, jealously guarding his dark secret. "So I came to the conclusion that I would take your tip, sir, and try a change of scenery for a while."

"Well we all of us make mistakes occasionally; that's what makes life so interesting," smiled the inspector. "But by the way. What was all that excitement you had up there with some kidnappers? I have only had a bare outline of the affair from Wilson, and he didn't seem to know much about it. What exactly happened?"

"Do you want the story officially or unofficially, sir?" cautiously asked Weston, with a sly grin.

"Unofficially, of course," was the prompt answer. "Under the circumstances it would hardly do to take official notice of the events. Take a chair and fire away."

Weston promptly complied. In contrast to Bryan the inspector possessed a vivid and fertile imagination, and when Weston had finished he was weak with laughter. During the recital he had, to relieve his feelings, alternately protested that Weston would some day be the cause of his early demise, and that he would one day be the star turn at a hanging bee if he got his deserts.

"What are your plans for the remainder of your leave?" inquired the inspector when decorum and sanity once more reigned in the office.

"I don't quite know as yet, sir. I may go down to Winnipeg and start studying high life at the Garry and the Royal Alec. I understand that the flowers of youth and fashion congregate at those caravanserais for tea-dances and things. And I am curious to see how they manage to keep alive in direct contradiction to the law about the survival of the fittest. And, besides, I am commencing to feel social ambitions. I want to pick up some of the wrinkles of how to juggle with a teacup, a plate and a girl's hand at the same time without disgracing myself. You see, I intend to educate myself, sir," he ended with a grin.

"Hop to it!" laughed the inspector. "And when you come back you will perhaps give lectures to the

boys on correct and polite behaviour. A little polish won't do them any harm. Sure you don't intend to join the Blue Band and the Salvation Army while you are about it?"

"I may, sir, if the spirit moves me," grinned Weston. Whereupon he took his leave and departed.

Emerged on the street his face lost some of its cheer. He felt a little depressed. He was about of the opinion that his leave had been so utterly ruined that he might as well throw the remains into the discard and go and report for duty at once. However, he decided to go over to the local billiard emporium on Main Street and play a game of pool while waiting for some inspiration.

Arrived before his destination he cast sweeping glances up and down the street in the hope that he would espy some of his particular cronies. Suddenly his roving glance became fixed to a lady who was standing looking into the window of a shop a little further up the street, and his face lit up.

The lady was Mrs. Allan Gunn, the wife of the manager at Revillon Freres' Post up at Beaver Narrows. And the Gunns he reckoned amongst his dearest friends.

"Holy smokes!" he muttered joyously to himself. "There is Mrs. Allan. Thank God for some sensible person to talk to. And I bet Allan himself is somewhere around too. Now, I call this luck!"

During his self-communion the lady had turned away from the shop-window and was strolling aimlessly up the street away from him, and he at once set off in pursuit. He slid along the boarded side-walk quickly and silently, his moccasined feet stepping almost noiselessly. He was going to give Mrs. Gunn a surprise. And the surprise succeeded far beyond his wildest expectations.

Having come within reach of his quarry he stretched out his arm and tapped her with a finger on the shoulder, a joyful grin on his face.

"Pee-bo!" he cried playfully.

The lady wheeled quickly, and Weston's grin was instantly ironed out, and its place was taken by an expression of frank, dismayed consternation and horror.

He was looking into the amazed and outraged face of a complete stranger! Her big blue eyes were opened wide, and they stared at him as if the owner fully expected him of being a lunatic at large.

Weston was confounded! There was something about the lady which vaguely reminded him of Mrs. Gunn, and he could quite see how he could have mistaken one for the other at a distance; but now, close up, he noticed that the likeness between the two was very faint. For one thing, the lady confronting him was much younger than Mrs. Gunn. She was hardly more than a girl.

The girl, on her part, saw before her a be-moccasined, clean-shaven young man, dressed in a rather disreputable suit of tweeds, the whole crowned by a battered old felt hat. But a closer look into his confounded face dispelled her first fears that she was dealing with a confirmed lunatic. And she vaguely wondered what had caused the owner of that seemingly pleasant, though momentarily highly embarrassed, face to succumb to a sudden act of apparent insanity.

This mutual scrutiny lasted only a few seconds, at the end of which Weston hastily tore off his hat.

"I . . . I am awfully sorry!" he managed to stutter; still half-dazed and feeling an utter fool, chump and idiot. "I have made a mistake. I took you for an acquaintance of mine; a Mrs. Gunn from Beaver Narrows. Confusing likeness, somehow. I really hope you will forgive me!"

During his explanation the girl's face had commenced to lose its expression of outraged amaze, and by the time he had finished a dimple had commenced to show on each cheek. Suddenly she threw back her head and burst into a hearty peal of laughter, and in spite of his chagrin and confusion Weston had time to notice that she had pretty teeth.

"How frightfully funny!" she burbled at last. "Mrs. Gunn is my sister, and I suppose there is some family likeness between us."

"Then you are Miss Elliott?" exclaimed Weston eagerly, his face clearing. "That certainly lifts a load off my chest. It seems to mitigate the offence not a

little. My name is Weston, by the way. I belong to the Mounted Police up here. Am I forgiven?"

"Of course you are. I think it was an awful good joke," smiled the girl. "So you are Sergeant Weston? I have heard a lot about you from my sister and Allan, so we are really old acquaintances in a way."

"Awfully decent of you to take it that way," said Weston, relieved. "But what are you doing up here in this world-centre? Are Mrs. Gunn and Allan here too?"

Miss Elliott's face grew a shade troubled.

"I am on my way up to Beaver Narrows for a visit, and I expected my sister and Allan to meet me here. But so far they have not shown up, nor have I received any message from them. I can't quite understand it."

"Did they know you were coming?"

"Oh, yes. I wrote to them and also sent a telegram informing them that I was on my way. But perhaps they have been delayed for some reason or other, and will turn up in a day or two."

Weston cogitated for a moment, then he asked:

"How long is it since you sent the letter informing them of your coming? And when did you dispatch your telegram? You see, the mails up to the trading-posts are rather uncertain and irregular," he explained. "And the telegram also has to go up there by mail from here. The mail is only sent up when the chance offers, and it takes from four to five weeks to get to Beaver Narrows. So you see, it is quite possible that things have got balled up."

"My word! At that rate they may have received neither my letter nor my telegram!" cried the girl, dismayed. "I wrote about two months ago, and sent the telegram a fortnight ago."

"Well, we'll soon find out all about it," said Weston practically. "Please come along to the post office; and we shall soon find out about what time they would have received your letter up at Beaver Narrows. Your telegram, at least, would not have reached them early enough to be of practical value. But don't worry! We'll see that you get up there safely even if things have got tangled up."

Side by side they walked down the street and entered the unpretentious, two-story wooden building which housed His Majesty's mails.

Having entered the office Weston crossed to the counter, popped his head inside the wicket set in the frosted glass partition, and shouted cheerfully:

"Hello, Banting!"

"Hello, Sergeant!" came the answer in a rumbling bass from the other side of the partition. "I thought you were up at Clear Water?"

"Got homesick. But come over here, I want to pow-wow."

A grey head appeared in the opening, followed by a lean, elderly, be-spectacled face, with moustache and goatee to match. The face beamed at Weston and his companion in a friendly manner, and the sergeant quickly effected the necessary introductions.

"This is Miss Elliott, Banting. And what you behold in yon window, Miss Elliott, is our esteemed post-master, Mr. Banting, who is a light-weight with a heavy-weight voice. Miss Elliott is Mrs. Gunn's sister, Banting. She is going up to the Narrows, and expected the Gunns to meet her here. But there seems to have been some kind of hitch. How long is it since you sent up any mail to the Narrows?"

The post-master scratched his head, and ruminated for a while.

"I reckon it is about two months ago," he said, coming out from his brown study. "There hasn't been anybody down from the Narrows since then, and nobody has been going up; so I haven't had a chance to send up the mail."

"Then they probably won't know I am on my way," cried the girl.

"It certainly looks that way," agreed the sergeant. "But we'll soon find out. Please let Miss Elliott have a look through the mail for the Narrows, Banting; then she can soon find out if her letter is still here."

"That's the idea," answered Banting, quitting the wicket, and turning to the letter-rack behind him. He removed a bulky package from one of the pigeon-holes, and returned with this to the counter. "Here you

are, Miss Elliott. This is the mail that has accumulated for the Narrows. Please have a look through and see if any of your messages are included in the bunch."

She quickly went through the bundle, and soon held up a letter and telegram for their inspection.

"Here are both my letter and my telegram!" she exclaimed. "They never got any of them, and have no idea that I am here!" For a minute or so she looked a little nonplussed; but suddenly she burst out laughing. "This is certainly a joke. If it had not been for you, Mr. Weston, I might have waited here till the grey hairs had commenced to sprout on my head."

"Hardly as long as that," muttered Weston, shooting a covert, but admiring, glance at the fair abundance crowning the girl's head; or at least that part of it that he could see below the hat.

"But what do I do now?" continued Miss Elliott.

"Don't you worry, miss," reassured Banting, his kindly face wrinkled in smiles. "The Police will see that you get up there safely. I won't deny that they are most a trial and nuisance to have around; but I admit they have their uses sometimes."

"Don't listen to the gentleman's libellous chatter, Miss Elliott!" laughed Weston. "Come along, and we'll try to make some arrangements."

"By the way, I suppose you are staying at the Palace?" asked Weston, when they were once more on the street.

"Yes. I went there when I arrived a couple of days ago."

"I suppose you know quite a few people in town?" continued Weston conversationally, as they walked in the direction of the hotel.

"Indeed I don't," answered his companion. "I don't know a soul here."

Weston stopped dead.

"Do you mean to say that you have been hanging around this burg and that dismal Palace on your lonesome for two days?" he queried, aghast, distrusting the evidence of his ears.

"I have; and, as you see, have managed to survive," she smiled.

"This won't do! This won't do at all!" averred Weston firmly. "This state of things must be remedied at once! Please come along with me." And so saying he commenced crossing Main Street towards one of the tributaries.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Miss Elliott curiously.

"I am taking you to Mrs. Trench. She is our inspector's wife, and one of the best."

"But I don't know her," she protested, "and can't break in on her like this."

"You will know her in about five minutes," grinned Weston. "And don't worry about breaking in on her. She likes it! She is a great friend of your sister's; and she will gnash her teeth and pour ashes over her head when she hears that you have been here for more than two days without her having been aware of the fact."

"Are you sure she won't roll on the floor and bite the furniture?" laughed Miss Elliott.

"I wouldn't be surprised if she does!"

They were quite a gay couple who presented themselves at the inspector's bungalow. Weston had been considerably impressed with the manner in which the girl had taken what must have been a distinct shock. It would have been enough to upset anybody to travel all the way from Toronto, expecting to be met at the journey's end, only to find out that one was stranded, and alone, in what did not amount to much more than a frontier town. But she had accepted the situation more humorously than otherwise; and he admired her for it.

Mrs. Trench was exceedingly sympathetic when she was informed about Miss Elliott's predicament. And her contrition at the lack of hospitality extended to her so far, took the practical form of a firm invitation, which brooked no opposition, that she take up her abode under her roof for the remainder of her stay in town. Miss Elliott was inclined to demur at first, but she soon realized the sincerity and genuine

hospitality behind the offer, and in the end gratefully accepted.

Inspector Trench soon arrived and at once voiced his hearty approval of his wife's arrangements so far; and they immediately went into session to discuss ways and means of how to get Miss Elliott to her destination. The discussion was brief and to the point. The inspector opened the proceedings with this profound query:

"Well, what about it, Sergeant?"

"The same idea has already occurred to me, sir. And I think it would be a sound scheme," promptly answered the sergeant with a smile.

"That's settled, then!" remarked the inspector with finality and obvious satisfaction.

Miss Elliott looked from one to the other unable to catch the drift of the cryptic utterances, and even Mrs. Trench looked puzzled.

"I don't doubt that your remarks are quite lucid to the average intellect," smiled the former, "but I am forced to admit that to me they appear just a trifle obscure."

The two officers laughed, and the inspector took upon himself to explain:

"I don't blame you for being puzzled. I am afraid that even a thought-reader would have found it difficult to discover enough of a skeleton on which to hang a body in our sketchy remarks. We are so badly paid in the police that we have to economize in everything, even words. And don't run down your intelligence. Even my wife, who ought to be used to our ways by now, seems out of her depth. The solution of the riddle is simply this: I suggested that the sergeant take you up to Beaver Narrows, and he was in hearty and immediate agreement. Weston is on leave just now, and time is hanging heavily on his hands. He was just praying for a job of work to turn up. He was so disgusted this morning that he actually mumbled something about joining the Salvation Army to get some action. Isn't that right, Sergeant?"

"Quite correct, sir," grinned Weston.

"But I can't really put you to all this trouble, Mr.

Weston! " cried Miss Elliott. " Especially when you are on leave."

" Don't you worry, Miss Elliott," broke in the inspector with twinkling eyes. " Weston likes pottering about in the wilderness. And, anyhow, his leave is up in four or five weeks, so part of his trip will be stern, grim duty. Besides, he also hinted this morning that he might take a trip to Winnipeg; and I don't really like to inflict an uncouth, rough man of the North on that respectable and unsuspecting community. So, you see, you are really doing a kind act towards society in general by taking him along."

The girl looked at the grinning sergeant.

" Are you really sure you won't be put to any inconvenience? "

" Positive! My esteemed friend Angus MacKenzie and I will get you up to the Narrows safely and painlessly in no time."

" And who is Mr. MacKenzie? Is he a Scotchman? "

A roar of laughter greeted her innocent query; and the inspector hastily expounded Angus's national status, racial extraction and peculiarities, and Angus's own views on the matter to Miss Elliott to explain their hilarity.

" But," he continued, " Weston and Angus are about the best canoe-men in the country, so you will be in safe hands."

The details for the trip were next settled. Miss Elliott suggested that they leave on the following morning; but this proposal was energetically vetoed by Mrs. Trench, supported by her husband. Mrs. Trench insisted that she stay at least three or four days, to give her an opportunity to make amends for her former neglect of her, as she expressed it. After some good-natured wrangling it was at last decided that they were to start for Beaver Narrows on the following Monday. That would give Miss Elliott four clear days' stay in the town.

When all was eventually settled Weston set out to find Angus to give that gentleman the necessary instructions for the forthcoming trip.

As he strolled down the streets towards the bridge across to the reserve where Angus had his habitat, his recent sad and mournful experiences up at Clear Water Lake came back to him with a rush. Events had moved so swiftly for the last couple of hours, and his brains had been kept so busy trying to solve Miss Elliott's troubles, that his own had been crowded into the background for the while.

But as the memory of that last deplorable evening on the lake came back to him, he was inclined to kick himself for a chump. The incident had inspired him with a deep distrust and suspicion of girls in general, and now he had deliberately gone and committed himself to be squire to another damsel. However, he tried to console himself, Miss Elliott had seemed particularly friendly, unaffected and cheerful, so perhaps the affair might turn out all right after all. And, besides, it was his simple duty as a friend of the Gunns to assist the girl in her present predicament. Anyhow, the matter was settled, so it was impossible to back out of it now. But his former joy at the satisfactory way in which the disposal of the remainder of his leave had been settled for him had been seriously eclipsed by vague distrust and forebodings. You never know what might happen when you mix with girls, he thought lugubriously with a mournful shake of his head. But, he decided, the only thing to do was to hope for the best; but be prepared for the worst.

They started early on Monday morning. It was with almost a sense of regret that Miss Elliott left the town. Everybody had been competing to give her a good time, and they had succeeded eminently. However, she consoled herself, she would be able to revisit all her new-found friends when she returned to Portage Bend in the spring.

The weather gods seemed to smile on them from the start. The morning was lovely. The broad Saskatchewan was shimmering like a mirror in the morning sun, and even the usually austere spruce-forest looked friendly. And those left behind agreed that the travellers would have an agreeable and pleasant trip.

But five days later the inspector, for one, got shaken in his conviction. On that day he received a communication from Headquarters in Prince Albert, which made him send Corporal Wilson and Alec Chaboye—the half-breed guide attached to the Detachment—post haste on the trail of Weston, with orders to cut down rest and sleep to a minimum till they had got in touch with him.

## CHAPTER XIV

In the meantime Weston and his companions had been pushing steadily northwards toward Beaver Narrows. For the first few days Weston eyed Miss Elliott warily, as if she were something in the nature of a dangerous infernal machine; but as nothing in her demeanour seemed to indicate even the remotest trace of any latent explosives, he soon forgot his fears, and became once more his natural, cheery self.

As a matter of fact, as time went on Miss Elliott not alone managed to put to shame his most pessimistic prognostications; but she actually helped to raise his general opinion of the opposite sex, which had recently been a little impaired.

Although this was her first trip into the wilderness, Miss Elliott seemed to slip into the life of trail and camp with an ease and quiet confidence which surprised and delighted her companions. From the first day she had insisted on wielding a paddle instead of confining herself to being a mere passenger. And Weston's unspoken prophecy, that her toil would cease promptly with the appearance of the first blister, and at the first spasm of fatigue and aches in back and arms, was decisively disproved. She laughed at fatigue and aches, simply pricked the blisters with a needle and stuck on a bit of plaster, and carried on.

Even Angus was impressed. He, whose pet

characteristic of a particularly unadroit cheechako up to then had been: "Heem behave like heem white squaw!" even he began to beam approvingly on her.

Miss Elliott also insisted on taking her turn carrying loads across the portages. At first she was inclined to consider the portage strap a particularly disagreeable instrument of torture, and "packing on the head" a procedure which could easily have been put in a class with the most cheerful inventions of the Inquisition. She admitted that her neck felt as if it were broken; but she persevered. And gradually the pain in her neck disappeared, and she was able to increase her loads without experiencing any inconvenience. Soon she was swinging along the portages in the wake of Weston and Angus with quite hefty packs.

She further insisted on being initiated into the more subtler mysteries of camp cooking. She soon mastered the art of making bannock and soda-biscuits in a frying-pan; of making flap-jacks, and flipping them scientifically over in the pan by a deft twist of her wrist; and of grilling fish Indian fashion. This was done by opening the fish along the back, cleaning it, and removing the backbone. Next it was stuck through the cleft of a green willow stick, with some cross-pieces stuck through the cleft on each side of the fish to keep it flattened out. It was then spread with lard; and the stick was finally jabbed into the ground, leaning obliquely towards the fire. She found that fish grilled in that way was a dish which ought to appeal to the most jaded palate.

Gradually, as she became a fair exponent of the various arts peculiar to camp cooking, she began to take sole charge of the kitchen department, utterly heedless of the protests voiced by the male members of the party. She was, however, frequently cheated out of her usurped rights in the mornings, when Weston and Angus would carry on a surreptitious competition to get ahead of her. But in spite of these initial signs of rebellion in the males, she had soon succeeded in firmly establishing her position in the routine of pitching camp at night. As soon as they

had picked out a site a fire was at once built for her, the grub-box and cooking utensils were set out near the fire; and she fell to while Weston and Angus ran up the camp. And it was always a delight to her to see how seemingly leisurely and unhurriedly the two men went about their work, and, nevertheless, how quickly everything was completed and in order. Her tent was in place, with a thick spruce-mat inside as ground cover for her bedding; and everything else was ship-shape before she had properly realized that the preparations had really commenced.

And when supper was over for the night, the males having successfully filled the bill as scullery-maids during the final rites, she loved to sit by the aromatic camp-fire, while the shadows in the dense forest around them deepened into dusk, and listen to the two men talk about the north and life up there.

And Weston found it quite easy to talk unreservedly to her. That was, of course, after he had got over his first panicky fear of provoking a back-fire by venturing an opinion. But when he found, after he had apprehensively embarked on a few tentative experiments, that not only were his opinions received with deference, but they were also judiciously weighed and commented on, his reserve soon broke down.

One must not, however, gain the impression that Miss Elliott was merely a simpering miss without any convictions of her own. Far from it. Weston soon found out that if a topic with which she was conversant cropped up in any conversation, she had very pronounced opinions and convictions of her own; and also that she was ready to stand up for them. But she did not stubbornly and regardlessly try to enforce her own point of view on her audience. She argued well, but judiciously, and listened patiently to opposing arguments; weighed them; and was not afraid of admitting herself beaten should the force of the argument go against her. And she and Weston had many good-natured wrangles about subjects ranging from the most sensible way in which to treat a blister to the colour-question and the rights of Man. The while Angus would be looking stonily straight

ahead of him, puffing furiously on his pipe, hopelessly bored, and shaken in his conviction as to the sanity of his companions.

Miss Elliott and Weston had soon fallen into the habit of calling each other by Christian names. The cause of this speedy intimacy was Angus's ideas on proper social intercourse. On the first day of the trip he had asked the girl:

"What's your name?"

"Miss Elliott," she had answered, a little surprised.

"No me mean, what they call you at home."

"Oh! Betty."

"Good," nodded Angus, and she henceforth became "Betty" to him.

And Weston found the practice contagious. His first attempts had been mere slips of the tongue, caused by listening to Angus's free and easy mode of address, which had appalled him and covered him with rosy confusion. But when Betty laughingly had assured him that she did not mind a bit, he took heart and recklessly let the slips develop into habit. But when she, also taking her cue from Angus, commenced to address him as "Wess," he firmly put down his foot.

"Now look here, please!" he protested energetically. "I have always objected to that silly nickname. It sounds something like the nasty sound one makes when one sharpens a knife on a whetstone. Awful thing! Please call me Dick. Only your sister has the good sense to call me by that nice and proper name. Those other idiots have saddled me with that other horror, and I'm afraid it will stick," he sighed resignedly.

In the afternoon of the ninth day, as they were traversing one of the numerous lakes which were strung along the watercourse like beads on a string, they were struck by one of those sudden, violent storms which periodically scourge the north during the latter part of the summer and early fall.

The day had broken clear and warm; but towards noon the heat had commenced to become oppressing and sticky, and the activities of the bull-flies had

increased in intensity. During their lunch-break Weston and Angus voiced the opinion that they were in for a storm. But as the place at which they were having their midday stop was rather low and swampy and not fit for a camp-site, they decided to push across the lake which was just ahead of them, and camp up somewhere on the northern shore where the ground was good.

But the storm beat them. They were still in the middle of the lake, with some three miles separating them from their objective, when they had the first indications that the storm was imminent.

The forerunners of the approaching tempest were innocent enough—merely a few puffs of chill wind, which commenced to ripple and agitate the placid surface of the lake. But behind the tree-tops on the eastern shore ugly, blue-black, irregular clouds began to mass and spread upward over the blue sky.

On the first puff of wind the course of the canoe had been altered, and they were now paddling for the east shore, about straight into the teeth of the approaching gale. Weston had warned Betty to sit tight when the storm should strike them, and, further, to use her paddle on the port side only.

They were still about a mile from the shore when the tempest struck them. They could follow its approach. The serene, solemn forest ahead of them was suddenly stirred into a mass of wildly swaying and tossing tree-tops and branches, and then the blast hit the lake and swept towards them, preceded by a skirmishing line of white foam.

The first furious gust all but took their breath away, and left them gasping; but they bent to their paddles and began to force their way slowly against the shrieking wind. The formerly quiet lake was soon a mass of tossing waves, and the spreading dark clouds rapidly blotted out the sun, leaving the landscape dark and dismal.

Up in the north-west streaks of lightning were zig-zagging down the clouds, and the rumbling thunder quickly gained in volume, and soon crashed and

thundered almost incessantly till the din was all but ear-splitting.

"Are you scared?" shouted Weston, who was paddling stern, to Betty, who was seated in the middle of the canoe, just in front of him.

"No!" she flung back over her shoulder, revealing a segment of a smiling face, flushed with healthy excitement. "I think it's fun!" Whereupon she turned her face away and once more applied herself with zest to her paddle; and Weston had to bestow his approving smile and nod on the back of her head.

As they were nearing the shore the wind abated somewhat; but as if the weather-gods were repenting of this concession and wanted to even matters, it began to pour with rain. It was not a drizzle; but a steady downpour, more as if a cascade was unintermittently playing down over their heads. And the murky atmosphere darkened still more, only split at times by dazzling flashes of lightning.

The three were soaked through in a moment; and the canoe, which had so far ridden the turbulent lake without shipping any water, thanks to Weston's and Angus's skilful handling of the canoe, now stood in serious danger of being swamped.

But their craft grated against the beach before the last named calamity was really overhanging; and the three bedraggled travellers climbed ashore.

Betty glanced at her two companions in distress and burst out laughing.

"We might as well have swum ashore," she cried gaily. "We could hardly have got any wetter."

"You clear out of here!" commanded Weston with a grin. "And get to shelter under the nearest tree while Angus and I salve our luggage."

"Shan't!" she countered mutinously. "I can't get more soaked than I am already; and the more hands, the quicker we'll get the stuff out of the wet."

Even as she was speaking she had made a dive for the canoe, which Weston and Angus had drawn up on the beach, had grabbed a bedding-roll, and with her spoil she sprinted for the shelter under the spread-

ing boughs of a big spruce-tree, leaving Weston no time to wrestle with this incipient rebellion and unprecedented flaunting disregard of his lordly dicta.

By their combined efforts they soon had all their effects comparatively safely stored away under the friendly branches of the spruce.

"That was certainly a whizzer!" commented Weston, having dumped the last bundle, as he gazed out on the inhospitable scenery.

"A bitch!" qualified Angus with conviction, which fitting, though somewhat indelicate observation, was tactfully overlooked by his companions.

"Now, Angus and I are going to put up your tent," continued Weston, addressing Betty. "And in the meantime, you'll please put on a coat and stick under this tree. And no more mutiny! You successfully raised the standard of rebellion a little while ago when I was not in a position to attend to the matter; but now I am more at leisure. And if you don't obey orders Angus and I will tie you to this tree!" he threatened with a grin.

"Oh! I suppose I'll have to be good then, just to avoid being manhandled by you two hulking roughnecks," she answered, with an impudent smile.

The tent was soon put up in spite of the handicap the rain imposed on them; and by some dexterous conjuring they even managed to light a big fire in front of the opening, the flaps of which were left wide open to let in the heat.

"There you are," said Weston as he and Angus returned to the tree to fetch Betty's effects. "All snug and comfy. Come along and change your wet clothes in a hurry. Angus and I'll retire some distance down the beach to leave you all the privacy you want."

"Very well, sir!" smiled Betty, clicking her heels and giving the sergeant a saucy military salute; whereupon the two males faded away in the rain.

While she was changing her soaked garments the rain gradually eased up, and at last stopped. Through the tent-opening she could see the dark, heavy clouds

roll slowly away towards the west, leaving in their wake a clear blue sky. Soon the sun again broke forth and caused the western shore, over which the heavy clouds were still hovering, to look even more sinister and forbidding in comparison to the sunlit stretches around. Occasionally a flash of lightning could still be seen cleaving its way down the tumbled mass of clouds over there; but the thunder only sounded like a faint rumble.

The wind, however, which had held its breath during the downpour of rain, now took a new lease on life and started with renewed vigour, sweeping with shrieks of fury through the tops of the groaning trees. But the tent was well sheltered from the furious blasts in amongst the timbers.

Having at last successfully finished her toilet, and feeling wonderfully refreshed, she stretched a line between two trees, and put her discarded wet clothing on it to dry.

Then she strolled forth to hunt for her companions. She found them a good half-mile down the shore, and she made a mental, amused comment on their unniggardly estimation of the margin of privacy.

Weston and Angus were lolling comfortably under a tree, pipes in mouth, a big fire in front of them, over which was slung the inevitable kettle.

They straightened up as they became aware of the girl.

"Hello! Changed already? That was certainly quick work," complimented Weston.

Instead of answering Betty contemplated the two for a few moments, a frown of disapproval gathering on her brow.

"Look here! Haven't you fellows changed yet?" she demanded abruptly.

Two pairs of surprised eyes met her own.

"Changed?" queried Weston.

"Huh?" from Angus.

"Yes. I mean changed. And if you don't know the word I'll spell it for you. Do you mean that you are still sitting about in your wet clothes?"

"We never change our clothes after a little rain-

storm; but let them dry on the body," explained Weston with a deprecating and uneasy smile. "They dry quite quickly. They are almost dry already."

"Sure!" supported Angus.

She looked at the couple with withering scorn; and they wriggled uneasily, feeling hopelessly guilty.

"You certainly are a couple of chumps!" she said at last, scathingly and uncompromisingly. "For two grown men you show as much sense as new-born babes. You certainly ought not to be let out on your own; but ought to have a nurse sent along to look after you. And I suppose if you get rheumatism or something nasty like that, you'll be lost in innocent wonder over how you caught it. Now off you go, both of you, with your kit-bags, and change in my tent. And when I say change, I mean c-h-a-n-g-e! So hop off, my little men. In the meantime I'll make some strong coffee and grub."

"Oh, but I say!" stammered Weston, dismayed. "We . . . we can't barge into a young lady's tent like this, you know."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! It won't outrage the young lady's feelings, if that's what is bothering you. And if you are so bashful that the mere idea of invading a young girl's domain causes rosy blushes to mount to your youthful cheeks, they'll have to mount. That won't kill you! Now, off you go. Both of you. At once!"

Correctly sensing that further arguments would be futile, the two offenders got up, grinning feebly. And they sheepishly slouched away in the direction of the tent, carefully avoiding looking at each other.

Betty watched their retreating backs with an amused smile, which broadened when she suddenly remembered the shameless display of female wearing apparel adorning the line outside her tent. She wondered how the sergeant would bear up under the shock when that exhibition met his eyes, and she deeply regretted that she was not there to watch.

In due course of time Weston and Angus returned, looking, perhaps, a shade more sheepish than when they departed; but under the mellowing influence of

coffee and a substantial meal they soon regained their mental equilibrium.

"What do we do now?" inquired Betty as the meal was over.

"Nothing," grinned Weston. "We are taking a holiday. The wind will keep up for three or four days if it runs true to form; and during that time it'll be hopeless to travel. So we'll make ourselves comfy. We'll fix an extra special good spruce-bed in your tent, and Angus and I'll rig up a lean-to for ourselves from some of our tarpaulins. And after that we'll loaf till the gale blows itself out."

"I see. No, I suppose it would be more than futile to try and push ahead in this wind. I never thought the lakes up here could be so rough. Some of those waves out there looked as big as small houses."

"And even so, we didn't really get the cream of the show," laughed Weston. "If we had been nearer the opposite shore when the gale struck us, you would have experienced some switch-back."

"That reminds me. Why did you head the canoe into the gale? It seems to me that it would have been easier to have run away from it."

"Easier; but infinitely more hazardous," answered Weston. "If one of those waves got under the stern of a canoe, chances are that the bow would bury itself in the lake; and it would mean a swim for the occupants. The theory has been tested occasionally and found correct. And besides, the beach on the windward side of the lake is only one mass of breakers on a day like this, so a canoe would stand every chance of being reduced to match-wood if you tried a landing. The proper way to handle a canoe in a gale is to head her straight into the wind, or rather, lay her obliquely to the waves; and she'll ride comfortably without running the danger of being swamped. It is certainly the more arduous way; but far the safest."

During the days of their enforced idleness, Betty and Weston roamed around in the woods. Occasionally Angus accompanied them; but mostly he preferred to stay around the camp and enjoy his leisured ease.

During their rambles they often came across tracks

of the various denizens of the woods, and Weston explained the various tracks to his companion and showed her how to recognize them. There were tracks of moose, of lynx, of bear, and the first cousin to the bear-tracks, the tracks of the trapper's despair, the cunning, thieving wolverine; as well as the tracks and signs of the lesser inhabitants of the deep forests.

But apart from flocks of partridges, which they scared up from time to time, the forest seemed to be peculiarly empty of life; and Betty commented on it.

"Why is it that we never see any of these beasts? Where are they? I haven't had a glimpse of any of them, except for an occasional moose having a bath in some lake or river, and a few squirrels."

"They are there, all around us," smiled Weston, making a sweeping motion with his hand. "But they are such shy, retiring creatures, that they seldom reveal themselves. Even a bear seems to remember an appointment elsewhere when a human being appears in the offing. The only time a bear shows any signs of aggressiveness is in the spring when he is hungry, and is still feeling a little of that early morning snappishness after his long hibernation. Of course the grizzly is different; but we haven't got any of those cheerful customers around here.

"I think it adds a certain thrilling charm and sense of mystery to the forests knowing that all these creatures are crouching all round you, just out of sight, warily watching you and waiting.

"It certainly is a glorious country," he ended with deep conviction and enthusiasm, as he looked approvingly about him. "The lakes, the rivers, the forests, and all the rest of it. And even the silence. You feel free and unhampered up here; and your own problems seem petty in comparison with the vastness of nature. I never get tired of it."

"I quite understand your enthusiasm," smiled Betty. "I have begun to love this country already myself, even after my short acquaintance with it."

And Weston beamed approvingly on her. As has been mentioned before, he took quite a proprietary

interest in the country, and was inclined to take any commendation as a personal compliment.

During these days she also learnt a lot about the work of the Police up in that part of the world. Up to now, she had looked upon the members of the Mounted Police as merely stern, uncompromising trackers of evil-doers; but listening to the sergeant she commenced to understand that the scope of their activities was far broader.

She learnt that not alone had the handful of men to maintain law and order in that vast territory; but they had also to play Providence and guardian angel to those who chose to inhabit it. And of those the Indians needed most attention, not alone because they were the most numerous; but just as much owing to their particular temperament.

When an Indian has managed to make a specially intricate tangle of his affairs, through his impracticability and indolence, he will invariably sit back and view the confusion with a kind of mild, childish wonder, while waiting for someone to come along and unravel the knots for him. And that someone would in most cases be some member of the Police.

Betty was also told about long, arduous treks into the wilderness in the middle of the frozen, cruel winter, when the travellers were frequently lashed by the stinging, cutting fury of the blizzards, to bring succour to trappers, prospectors and others who had come to grief up in that white land of silence. And as she listened she began to realize that even these altruistic duties of the Police were fraught with hard toil and hazards.

But as far as she could judge from the sergeant the toilers themselves only seemed to regard their hard work and hazardous patrols as frolicsome, entertaining adventure—the more hazardous the merrier.

From Weston's stories, supplemented by surreptitious information gathered from Angus, she commenced to get a true index to his character. She began to realize that underneath his perpetual easy, almost indolent, good-nature and nonchalance was hidden determination, resourcefulness and a resolute will.

"Is it true, what is generally said, that the Police always get their man?" she inquired on one occasion.

Weston laughed.

"I am afraid the statement is grossly exaggerated. I must admit, however, that given a reasonably fair trail our efforts have generally been crowned with some success. But occasionally it happens that the transgressors make themselves scarce before we even know they have been naughty; and by the time we start getting busy, they have covered their tracks so well that it is often impossible to pick them up. Then, again, it happens occasionally that the fugitive manages to outwit us in spite of our well tried and celebrated ingenuity and intelligence; but, I must admit, that doesn't happen very often. And then, of course, it happens that the stalked gets the stalker."

"But that doesn't happen frequently, does it?"

"Not very. Most of the law-breakers know that such tactics invariably cause them future grief," answered Weston grimly. "So they seldom try it, unless they are particularly wanting in intelligence, or are madmen. We had an ugly case in point only last winter. An Indian up near Lac du Broche had been a bit dotty; but gradually he began to take violent objection to people around him for no apparent reason. And he got into the habit of punctuating his objections with pot-shots. As he was well on the way of becoming an ubiquitous nuisance his surroundings naturally grew a little peeved; and they warned our people. A constable was sent up at once, with orders to secure the man and take him down to the asylum in Prince Albert.

"But the wily lunatic must have got to know of the constable's visit in some way or other. Anyhow, on the day the constable arrived, he had hidden himself in some brush near his shack; and he shot our man through the back as he was about to open the door."

"Did he kill him?"

"Unfortunately, yes. He shot him right through the heart."

"And what happened to the madman?" she questioned, shuddering a little in spite of herself.

"Well, I managed to collect the erring sheep a month later."

"How did you do it? Please tell me all about it," exclaimed Betty eagerly.

"There is nothing much to tell. I took Angus along, and we went up to his haunts. He had hidden out somewhere by then, of course; and for some time it was impossible for us to locate his exact hiding-place. The Indians regard a madman as a kind of holy man, so we couldn't hope for much assistance from them. But one day the lunatic committed an indiscretion. He happened to take objection to a relative of his, who came along to pay him a friendly visit. The objection was at once followed by the usual demonstration, of course, which the relative considered a bit thick. In high dudgeon he went straight to me and gave away the location of the hiding-place; so Angus and I got busy at once, and went and collected the playful lunatic."

"And what happened when you found him?" queried his audience a little impatiently, when Weston showed signs of considering the tale told. Like Constable Bryan, she was inclined to lean towards the opinion that Weston's skill as a narrator was open to vast improvement. "I mean, the fellow did surely not receive you as a long lost brother, and fall around your neck. Did he?"

"Not exactly," grinned Weston. "As a matter of fact, his actions seemed to indicate that he grew considerably peeved when we trickled on to the scene. Or so I judged. Because he perforated a perfectly good Stetson hat of mine with his artillery. It looked like a collander by the time he was through playing with it, after having wasted a scandalous lot of ammunition."

"But how perfectly dreadful! You ought to consider yourself awfully lucky that he did not hit your head and kill you on the spot," exclaimed Betty, trying to frown down some of the flippancy in the narrator, which she found misplaced under the circumstances.

"Lucky nothing," answered Weston more cheerful than ever. "That wasn't luck; but strategy. You see my head was not anywhere near my hat. The hat was simply hanging from a stick which Angus pushed around in the grass, while he himself was safely sheltered behind a particularly hefty tree-trunk. Every time our Indian friend got a glimpse of my erratic headgear, he got excited, and fired; whereupon Angus promptly shot a hole in the air as a quittance for the courtesy. And the more the hat wriggled around, the more ambitious grew the fellow, with Angus answering shot for shot. Well, while the two were busy amusing each other, I circled around through the wood and sneaked up on the fellow from the rear. He was so busy exchanging pleasantries with Angus that he didn't know I was anywhere near before I had flung myself on his back. Then Angus joined the merry scrimmage, and we had the fellow securely bound in a trice. And then we brought him to Prince Albert and lodged him in the lunatic asylum, where the poor fellow still lingers."

"I suppose he wasn't particularly amiably disposed towards you for catching him?"

"Not very," sighed Weston. "Although I exerted all my personal charm to promote a more cordial and chummy intercourse between us, he left me with the impression that he considered me about the outside edge of everything nasty. But let us leave this painful topic. See, the sun is down. Let's go down to the shore and catch shrimps."

"We might as well, seeing that you obviously intend to play oyster," laughed Betty. "Come on, I'll race you!" And she was off like the wind towards the little sheltered bay which was their nightly hunting-ground for the little crustaceans. Weston might have won the race; only he did not in time notice the heavy branch lying in his path; and by the time he had picked himself up and had finished his unkind, potent, though unspoken, thoughts about the innocent cause of his downfall, the race was over with him simply nowhere.

They spent a delightful hour paddling around in the

warm water; and they dexterously dislodged the wriggling shrimps from beneath submerged rocks and stones and dropped them in tin cans partially filled with water. That their sleeves got wet right up to the shoulder in no way detracted from their enjoyment; and they were a merry couple who eventually marched proudly back to camp, each with a tin nearly full of shrimps.

They all enjoyed themselves so well at their temporary camp that it caused them almost a pang of disappointment when the wind died down towards the evening of the third day. And when they continued their interrupted trip on the following morning all felt a little as if they were leaving the Old Homestead to sally forth into an inhospitable and hostile world.

Three days later, in the afternoon, when they were crossing a small lake, Angus suddenly commenced to sniff the atmosphere suspiciously, as a light puff of wind, blowing out to them from the heavily-timbered south shore, struck the canoe. He detected a faint, but unmistakable, odour of burning wood on the breeze. He would have liked to have classified with certainty the odour, whether it was the acrid smell of burning green wood, or the more aromatic scent of dry sticks; but the light puff had passed them by, and was merrily rippling its way across the lake, before he had time to settle the question. He scanned the shore carefully; but nowhere could he detect any indication of a fire. He knew there were no human habitations around that lake; and as there were no canoes to be seen anywhere on the beach, nobody could be camping in there. Perhaps there was a forest fire somewhere to the south of them, too far away to be actually seen, but near enough for that little whiff of smoke to have been carried up to them on the breeze. That was perhaps it. But the explanation did not quite satisfy him. He wished he could have had another whiff of that smoke. He hated puzzles without any definite solution. He had found that an unsolved riddle might hide danger.

As they paddled along he often threw long, search-

ing glances backwards towards the woods; but he could detect nothing which might have any bearing on the puzzle.

But if his eyes could have penetrated some fifty yards into the dense undergrowth he would have been enlightened.

By a fire, which had burnt down to glowing embers, was seated an Indian, leaning up against a canoe, which was lying bottom up on the ground. His features, with the close-set eyes, bore an expression of malevolent cunning; and there was a bestial cruelty stamped over the whole face, which seemed to exclude the existence of any normally human feelings in its owner.

As soon as the faint splashes from the passing canoe reached his ears he flattened himself on the ground, and wriggled carefully and noiselessly forward, till he had a view of the craft from behind a screen of bushes.

As soon as his eyes fell on its occupants his face contorted with wild, passionate fury. Quickly he wriggled back to his camp, grabbed a rifle, and again pushed forward to his previous point of vantage. He raised his rifle to his shoulder; paused; hesitated; and then again lowered it. A cunning leer suddenly flashed across his features; he raised his hand and shook it at the departing canoe, while he mumbled something to himself. Then he turned around and wriggled back to his camp.

About half an hour later Weston's party turned into a broad, smooth river. After having paddled up this river for a short distance Angus suggested to pitch camp in an inviting green glade which they were just passing.

"But hang it, Angus!" protested Weston, staring, "it is too early to camp yet. Why, the afternoon is only half gone."

"This best place to camp for many miles," answered Angus. "Will be very late night before coming to other good camping-place."

Weston looked thoughtfully at Angus. He knew his statement was not in strict accordance with the

truth; but at the same time he knew that Angus never made an idle suggestion. And he wondered.

It was Betty who settled the question.

"Oh, yes! Let's camp here. This spot looks just lovely. And we are not in any particular hurry, are we?" she exclaimed with a smile. That remark killed any further objections from Weston, of course; and the bow of the canoe was turned towards the clearing, which stretched right down to the water.

As soon as everything was in order, and a merry fire was going, Angus grabbed his rifle and prepared to depart.

"Hello, Angus!" exclaimed Weston. "Where are you off to with your rifle?"

"Go for walk. Perhaps fin' jumpin'-deer," answered Angus.

"But, you mutt, you won't find any jumping-deer around here!"

"Mebbe so. Me see," and with those words he commenced walking along the river-bank, in the direction from whence they had come; and he soon disappeared in the woods.

Angus had no intention to look for jumping-deer. He did not know exactly what he was looking for. But he was filled with vague suspicions. He had smelt a fire where no fire was in evidence; and his strongly-developed instinct warned him that no suspicious signs, be they ever so trivial, ought to be ignored or lightly dismissed. So he had decided to scout around over their back-tracks, and see what he could see.

He walked rapidly along the river-bank, just far enough back in the brush to be screened from possible observers on the river, his eyes dodging ahead of him for possible signs.

Having made a short cut across a bend a couple of miles below the camp he stopped dead. Drawn up on the beach, just ahead of him, was a derelict canoe!

Without wasting time on further investigations he turned around and sprinted straight for camp.

## CHAPTER XV.

Following Angus's departure for parts unknown Betty and Weston sat chatting by the fire. Owing to the early break they had not yet commenced preparing supper. Of course a kettle of water had been slung over the fire; but purely as a reflex-movement.

Betty was principally leading the conversation, while Weston's contributions to the feast of reason and flow of soul were meagre, and half absent-minded. He was frankly puzzled. He held no clue to Angus's somewhat mysterious movements; but he knew enough of Angus to commence feeling uneasy when that gentleman chose to become mysterious.

Often his eyes would stray towards the point where Angus had disappeared; whereupon they would describe an arc around the fringe of the clearing. In the middle of one of those sweeping glances he suddenly stiffened—and immediately Betty had several shocks at once.

Weston's arm shot out like lightning, and his hand struck her shoulder so hard that it sent her sprawling to the ground. At the same moment she heard a thud beside her, and almost in the same breath the sharp report of a rifle. Dazed and shaken, almost in a detached way, she saw the sergeant's body crumple up and sag to the ground, and at the same moment she heard another report; and from behind a tree-trunk, some fifty yards away, the body of a man fell sideways, a rifle dropping from his nerveless hand as he slid to the ground. Next she discovered Angus coming running from a point farther back in the woods, his rifle held ready in his hand. She saw him stop for a few seconds looking down at the huddled man under the tree, a wild ferocity distorting his usually placid countenance; then he bent quickly down over the body. After a short examination he

straightened up with an expression of grim satisfaction on his face, and strode rapidly across to her.

By now she had recovered to the degree that she was sitting up, watching the huddled body beside her with horror-dilated eyes staring out from her white face.

"What has happened?" she whispered to Angus through trembling lips.

"Mad Injun shoot. Bad man! The one sergeant tell you about one day. Was in mad-house; not know how he get here!" explained Angus succinctly, as he knelt down by the sergeant. He straightened the inert body out on its back, felt pulse and heart, and then grunted.

"Is he . . . is he . . . dead?" stammered Betty, tremulously and fearfully.

"No, alive an' kickin'!" answered Angus, a faint smile flitting across his dark features.

"And the . . . other man?"

"Dead!" came the brief answer with grim satisfaction.

She threw a shuddering look across at the dead man, then her gaze returned to the sergeant. On his shirt an ominous red patch was steadily growing. It appeared to her frightened glance as if the stain was alarmingly close to the heart.

Angus got up and hurriedly walked over to the grub-box, returning immediately with a bundle. This contained Weston's emergency kit, without which he never travelled.

Betty had now managed to shake off her first daze of horror; and when Angus unrolled the bundle, and the bandages and other paraphernalia lay revealed, she exclaimed eagerly:

"Let me help bandaging him, Angus! I know quite a bit about bandaging wounds!"

"Good," grunted Angus, getting up and lifting the kettle—which had been bubbling merrily on, totally unaffected by the tragedy enacted—off the fire, and returned with this and a basin.

Between them they carefully cut away the shirt and bared his left breast. They found that the bullet had

entered above his left lung, had passed cleanly through, without touching any bones, and had come out just below the left shoulder-blade. The discovery caused Angus to grunt his satisfaction, and his face cleared a little.

When they had carefully washed away the blood with warm water, in which a quantity of boracic powder had been dissolved, Betty discovered an old healed scar near the fresh wound.

"What is that, Angus?" she asked, pointing.

"Sergeant got shot by bohunk down in Portage Junction once," explained Angus indifferently; and she shuddered. She commenced to realize that Weston's life had been even less of a sinecure than she had been given to understand.

Having washed the wounds, they sprinkled them with boracic powder and bandaged a pad firmly over each; Weston remaining unconscious throughout the operation.

"He isn't in . . . any danger?" she asked a little fearfully, when the operation was finished.

Angus stared at her incredulously.

"Danger? Him? From little hole like him had? Not much!" he quoth firmly with a touch of contempt. "Takes more 'an just one little hole to kill Wess! Him be little sick, perhaps. But not much, me not think," he added as an afterthought.

They next put his bedding in Betty's tent, carefully lifted him between them, and carried him on to the prepared bed, both endeavouring to make him as comfortable as possible.

Presently Weston sighed and opened his eyes. For a moment he gazed a little vaguely at the two bending over him, then his eyes circled slowly round the canvas walls and roof surrounding him. Bringing his eyes back to the girl he asked slowly and laboriously:

"Why . . . am I . . . in your tent . . . Betty?"

"Hush, you mustn't talk," reproved Betty gently. "You are wounded, and must keep still. That's why we put you in here."

"I know . . . I am . . . wounded," continued Weston, making a ghastly effort to grin. "I saw . . .

his . . . gun . . . pointing at . . . me. Who . . . was he? "

"Little Otter from Broche," explained Angus.

"The lunatic. Must . . . have got . . . away from . . . the asylum. What happened . . . to him? "

"I shot him. Killed him," answered Angus shortly.

"Poor chap! " mumbled Weston. "We must . . . discuss . . . what to . . . do now."

"You are not to do any more talking! " interrupted Betty with determination. "Don't worry about the future or anything else. Angus and I will arrange all that."

Weston pondered for a while.

"I am . . . sorry . . . to have . . . become . . . such a . . . nuisance . . ." he commenced; but Betty again interrupted.

"Don't talk like that, please! " she cried with a catch in her voice. "And please be quiet, and rest! Would you like some water? "

"Please! "

Angus went out, returning in a few moments with a mug, and Weston greedily drank some of its contents. The water seemed to refresh him, for he immediately began to give utterance to a fresh train of thought.

"I say . . . Betty. I can't . . . stay . . . in here. Where . . . are you . . . to sleep . . . then? "

"Oh, please don't worry. I am going to sleep right here; and I am going to nurse you. Don't talk! " she ordered hurriedly, as Weston showed signs of breaking out again. "I know what you are going to say. But under conditions like these, conventions automatically cease to exist."

A faint smile flitted across Weston's drawn face; but he kept silent. Presently he closed his eyes.

"We had better leave him for a while," whispered Betty to Angus. "Then, perhaps, he will fall asleep."

"You wait here," whispered Angus in return. "I got somethin' to do. I call you, when you come out."

She looked inquiringly at him; but suddenly understanding came to her with a rush. For the moment

she had forgotten that sprawling body under the tree out there. Of course, Angus wanted to remove that horror from sight before she came out. And she felt grateful, as well as surprised, at his thoughtfulness and delicacy of feeling.

"Very well," she said quietly, seating herself on her own bedding, while Angus quitted the tent.

Weston lay quite still, seemingly dozing; and as she watched him, her hands clasped in her lap, tears commenced to well up in her eyes and trickle down her cheeks.

Up till now things had moved so swiftly that she had had no time to think of anything but the needs of the moment; but now, when she was sitting idle, the reaction began to set in, and she saw the tragedy in all its grim nakedness.

Only a short hour ago the sergeant had been virile, active—bubbling over with glorious life; and now . . . Would he die? she thought in sudden panic. Oh, God! not that. He was lying there so quietly, and his face was so pale and drawn. Angus seemed to have been so assured that there was no danger; but was Angus a thoroughly competent judge?

She recovered herself with a start; and with an angry shake of her head she dashed the tears from her eyes. This was no time for letting herself slip! She must face the situation bravely, and not be a silly, weak-kneed idiot, she reproved herself sternly.

She pulled out her handkerchief and energetically dried her eyes. Then she sat up straight, resolutely banishing pessimistic thoughts and firmly resolved to play the game whatever happened.

How long she sat there she did not know. At intervals Weston would stir slightly, and would mumble a few words which she was unable to catch; but apart from that they sat in silence.

At last Angus carefully parted the tent-flaps, and stuck in his head. He glanced at the sergeant and nodded his satisfaction; and then beckoned to her to come out.

Carefully she got up and followed him outside. She threw a quick, shuddering glance over to the

place where she had last seen the dead Indian; but as she had already surmised, the body had disappeared.

"We eat now," said Angus in a matter-of-fact voice, nodding towards the fire. On one side of it a tarpaulin had been spread, on which had been placed cups, plates, a frying-pan with freshly fried bacon and beans, a plateful of flap-jacks, bannock butter and jam. And the kettle belched forth a pleasant aroma of coffee.

"Oh! Have you done the cooking already, Angus?"

"Sure!"

"That isn't fair. However, I don't think I could eat anything just yet."

"Must eat! Can't do nothin' on empty belly!" answered Angus, practically and elegantly.

She had to smile in spite of herself.

"All right! I'll try."

They sat down by the tarpaulin, and to her surprise Betty discovered that she was ravenously hungry, and that she was able to do full justice to the sumptuous repast once she had got started.

During the progress of the meal Angus frequently got up, tip-toed softly up to the tent and peeped inside; and on his return from each of these trips he could report that the patient was still sleeping.

When they had finished their supper Angus poured some oatmeal into a kettle of water which was hanging over the fire.

"Food for Wess when him wake," he explained in answer to the girl's questioning look. "Makin' oatmeal soup. Ver' good for sick people. Oatmeal is right stuff for us Scotchmen."

Only by exerting all her willpower did Betty save herself from committing a breach of etiquette; and to guide her thoughts into less frivolous channels she asked:

"What are we going to do now, Angus?"

Angus looked at her for a few moments as if appraising her.

"You think you can stay here one, mebbe two, days along of Wess alone?" he asked at last.

She was struck with a feeling of dismayed surprise

at this sudden and unexpected query. For a moment she had a shrinking, panicky feeling that the task was way above her faculties. She felt too inexperienced to be able to handle this task alone. But her dismay and alarm were only transient, and she soon had herself in hand again. She must prove that she was able to take her turn without flinching.

"Of course I can, Angus!" she averred firmly. "But where do you intend going?"

"Early to-morrow mornin' me go down to Indian settlement down there," he waved his hand towards the south, "an' mak' them sen' message to Bend an' up to Beaver Narrows to mak' your people come fetch you. I be gone not more 'an two days. You sure you able manage?"

"Quite!"

"Good! You'll do to shoot river with!"

She flushed with pleasure at these homely words of praise from the reserved Angus; and especially at the smile of approval he flashed at her. Angus was a man who was niggardly with open praise and approving smiles, and to gain his commendation was a thing that mattered.

"Do you intend having the sergeant brought to Portage Bend?" she pursued her queries.

"No. Can't move him just now. Must be quiet, or else perhaps bleed to death inside. Has to stay till better," explained Angus.

"But, at least, you ought to get a doctor."

Angus smiled faintly. The nearest doctor was at Portage Bend.

"Take too long to get doctor here. Wess will be well long before him get here. Me doctor him. Don't worry, Wess tough as hell!" he said getting up to have another peep at the patient, leaving Betty smiling at his unaffected freedom of expression.

Half an hour later Weston woke up. He declared he was feeling fine, a statement which was received with frank, impolite scepticism by the others. He drank some of the oatmeal soup, and promptly dozed off again.

He spent a rather restless night, and several times

Betty had to give him water, which she varied with cold oatmeal soup. In the morning he looked neither better nor worse; but his face was rather flushed, and she anxiously called Angus in for a consultation.

"That is nothin'," declared the doctor in his best professional manner, after having examined his patient. "He will be a little sick, but it soon pass over."

Having delivered this profound dictum he climbed into his canoe. He had already instructed her to feed the patient on oatmeal soup only during his absence, and to ignore any demands from the patient for a more substantial diet.

She felt not a little forlorn after having watched Angus's canoe disappear down the river. All her doubts of yesterday came back to her, and she experienced a hopeless feeling of helplessness in the consciousness of her own utter lack of experience. She began to doubt whether she had not taken on more than she was able to handle. She was so utterly alone and cut off from the rest of the world; and Angus's optimistic view on the situation had only half convinced her. What should she do if Weston's condition was really far more serious than they imagined?

But at this point in her reflections she forced back the tears which were once more threatening to flood her eyes; and with lifted head she looked defiantly about her, as if challenging the world at large to do its worst! Whatever happened, she would do her best without weakening.

The day passed quickly enough. Between cooking her own meals and looking after her patient she found plenty to occupy her time. Weston was very restless and craved for water almost incessantly. She had to sit by him most of the time to prevent him from tossing and worrying too much on his bunk, as she had noticed that he seemed more quiet when she was near. From time to time she fed him with some soup, to which she occasionally added small doses of whisky, according to Angus's instructions.

Weston hardly spoke at all during the day. He seemed to lie in a semi-daze most of the time.

During the following night his restlessness increased,

and his heavily flushed face made it plain to Betty that he had a violent fever. She laid compresses on his burning head, made up from her own handkerchiefs soaked in eau-de-Cologne, and these she frequently changed. Other remedies she did not possess.

Weston was all the time muttering to himself. At first the words were more or less unintelligible; but they gradually grew more coherent and comprehensible.

Now he was evidently chasing behind his dog-team up in the frozen North, shouting orders to his dogs, and cursing them good-humouredly. At other times he seemed to be shooting rapids in his canoe. And, again, he was back at school, giving his unreserved and unqualified opinion of his various masters.

Then he would know where Angus was, and, without waiting for an answer, he would burst forth into lengthy dissertations about his opinion of the listening girl; dissertations which caused rosy blushes to flood her cheeks, and gentle smiles to illumine her anxious and tense features.

At other times he would lie quiet, half unconscious; and those moments were about the hardest to bear for the watcher. The unbroken silence about her accentuated her utter loneliness, and her vague fears increased. And she shivered when her brain at times conjured up visions of dread possibilities. But she determinedly strove to force those visions away from her, knowing that did she allow her mind to dwell on them, her courage might ebb away.

The dismal night dragged on, and the grey twilight had changed into the light of day when a change seemed to come over the patient. The hectic flush gradually left his face, and his breathing, which had been short and laboured, now grew more regular. And after a while he seemed to be sleeping normally. She did not know much about traumic fever, but she hoped that these signs portended a change for the better.

She felt unutterably weary in mind and body. The past anxiety and worry had taxed her strength more than she had been aware; and after she had sat for a while to convince herself that Weston was really sleep-

ing, she turned to her own bunk and stretched herself out, fully dressed as she was. And almost before her head had touched her pillow, she was fast asleep.

When she again awoke the sun was shining full on the tent. Her thoughts were a little confused at first, and she had to grope around in her memory for her bearings. Suddenly realization came to her. She quickly raised herself into a sitting posture on her bunk, and looked anxiously across at the sergeant. But what she saw reassured her. The patient was still sleeping tranquilly, his respiration coming regularly and rhythmically; and she heaved a sigh of relief. Evidently the fever had really burnt itself out.

She looked at her watch and found, much to her surprise, that it was close on eleven o'clock. She got up quietly, collected towel, soap, and a few toilet-articles, and stole silently out of the tent.

The day was bright and warm, with a mild zephyr gently agitating the air. She walked down to the river and seated herself on the bank while she shook out her hair to let the breeze blow it about. Under the mellowing influence of smiling Nature her anxieties and fears of the preceding night already seemed to have receded into a dim and distant past; and she once more began to feel the joy of living. As she looked out over the sun-bathed river and forest, some of the things which Weston had uttered last night came back to her. At the memory she smiled dreamily; and for a long time she sat staring straight and fixedly ahead of her, sunk in what seemed to be a not unhappy reverie.

Some twenty minutes later she returned to camp. She was feeling wonderfully refreshed after a dip in the cool waters of the river, and she was humming gaily to herself. She broke off her musical efforts, however, as she neared the tent, for fear of disturbing her patient. She parted the tent-flaps and peeped inside, and to her satisfaction found him still sleeping peacefully.

She then proceeded to prepare her belated breakfast. Her meal finished, she cleaned and dried the dishes, and put the oatmeal soup left over from yesterday on the fire to have it hot for the patient when he awoke. She had made careful tests, and had come to the conclusion

that the concoction was least unpalatable—not to say objectionable—when hot; though only just.

Still feeling the need for further scope for her energies she decided to make soda-biscuits.

While she was busy preparing the dough, she heard a feeble hail from the tent.

She walked rapidly across, and found the patient awake. His eyes looked a little tired, and his face somewhat pale and drawn under the tan; but otherwise he looked almost normal, she noticed with inward joy.

"Good morning, Dick!" she smiled her greeting. "How are you feeling?"

"Fit as a fiddle, thanks," he answered in a somewhat weak voice; but with his old-time grin in almost normal working order. "But, say. What is the matter with your hands?"

A little puzzled she looked down to where her hands were clutching the tent-flaps; and immediately burst out laughing.

"Oh, that's flour. I am in the middle of making soda-biscuits."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Weston with satisfaction. "I can do with a few of those. I am as hungry as anything."

"I am sorry to have to disappoint you," was the gentle but firm retort. "You are only allowed oatmeal soup."

Weston stared at her in obvious consternation, making a wry face.

"You don't mean it!" he protested, aghast. "I have a recollection of that soup from yesterday. It was yesterday, wasn't it? Or was it last week? Oh, it was yesterday, was it. Well let me tell you that soup is not fit for a weak invalid. It really isn't! Don't you think you could see your way to give me something more substantial in the line of victuals?" he pleaded, looking hopefully up at her.

But the pathos of his earnest supplication was wasted on the stern arbiter of his diet.

"No. You can't have anything more substantial than the soup for the time being. You were a very

sick man last night. You had a violent fever and were very delirious. As a matter of fact, you were raving all night through, and were almost out of your head." She had no scruples in laying on an extra thick layer to further the good cause. "So you will have to stick to the soup till I'm quite sure the fever has left your system. I'll go and fetch it now; it's all ready for you."

And to avoid further fruitless arguments, she quickly dropped the tent-flaps and walked over to the fire.

She found him very thoughtful when she returned a few moments later, a mug in her hand.

"Look here, Betty," he said. "Honestly, now. Was I really as bad as that last night, or were you only pulling my leg?"

"Honestly and truly, you were a very sick man!" was the diplomatic rejoinder. "Now take the soup, and swallow it like a good little man."

He obediently took the mug and tasted the contents gingerly with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

"Hm!" he grunted reflectively. "There seems to be an elusive flavour about this concoction which vaguely arouses pleasant memories." He took another tentative sip. "Whisky?"

Betty nodded her head.

"Oh, well. That helps matters a little, of course. Although this confounded oatmeal slush nearly kills the taste of the whisky. Look here," he continued brightly. "What is wrong with giving me the whisky and the soup separately?"

"You are quite impossible!" laughed his tormentor. "As a patient you are quite hopeless. You are more fussy than a baby. You have to take the two mixed. This is medicine, mind you, and not a banquet."

"Oh, well," sighed Weston resignedly, seeing his last hope dashed to the ground, as he once more applied himself to the mug.

Half-way down the cup he pondered for a moment, and then asked abruptly and suspiciously:

"Where is Angus this morning?"

"Oh, he left here yesterday morning," was the airy answer. "He was going down to the Indian settlement south of here to get help. He'll probably be

back some time to-night or first thing to-morrow morning."

Weston stared at her, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Do you mean to say," he got out at last, "that Angus buzzed off and left you here alone with me?"

"Yes. Why not? I am perfectly capable of looking after you, am I not?"

"That's beside the point," cried Weston angrily. "I have never heard anything more absurd in my life! Fancy buzzing off and leaving a girl alone here with a sick man. Why, I might have petered out and left you with a corpse on your hands! That would have been a nice kettle of fish, with you cut off from the rest of the world!"

"Well, fortunately nothing like that happened. And Angus was sure there was no likelihood of anything like that happening, or else he would not have gone," interposed Betty soothingly.

"How could Angus know?" snorted Weston, reluctant to forgo his grievance. "Well, when Mr. Angus returns, he'll wish he had kept on going instead of coming back after I am through with him!" he threatened grimly.

"He won't wish anything of the kind!" averred Betty with spirit. "You are not to abuse him in any way. He only did what he considered best in the circumstances; and I was in hearty agreement with his plan. So there will be no reproaches, lectures, or anything of the kind!"

Weston looked at her in quizzical despair over the rim of the cup.

"Oh, look here!" he remonstrated. "You wouldn't mind my cussing him just a wee, tiny bit for being such a chump, would you?"

"I most decidedly would! He has not been a chump; so there! You are to greet him as a public benefactor when he returns. And if you don't promise, there will be no more whisky with your soup!" she threatened ominously.

"Oh, well," grinned Weston. "Under those circumstances I suppose my hands are tied and my mouth sealed. Angus shall go unscathed. But, say,"

he continued seriously and awkwardly, "I must say you are a brick to tackle a proposition like this single-handed. There are not many who would have done it." He felt the intended compliment to be hopelessly lame and utterly inadequate; but it was the best he could think of for the moment.

"Don't be absurd!" laughed Betty, blushing a little. "Anybody would have done the same thing. Now finish that soup," she continued hurriedly, as Weston showed signs of wanting to debate the question. "You have been talking too much already; and you need a rest. And, besides, I have to return to the soda-biscuits."

At the words a spasm of pain shot across Weston's face, and he asked pathetically:

"Really not a hope?"

The tyrant interpreted that enigmatical sentence correctly, and promptly answered:

"Not to-day. But perhaps to-morrow if you don't suffer a relapse. So be a good little man and finish your nice soup."

Ignoring the insults, Weston reluctantly complied. When he had at last brought the agony to an end, Betty took the empty mug.

"Now lie quiet, and try to sleep," she admonished. "After all the talking you have done, you ought to feel tired and sleepy."

"Well, to tell the truth, I do feel a little as if a shut-eye wouldn't do me any harm. Must be because I have been gorging myself on that heavy fare," he answered, with heavy sarcasm.

His nurse turned away, laughing.

"Well, good night, my little man. And if you want me, call."

"All right. Thanks so much. So long, nurse."

Betty returned to her soda-biscuits; but somehow a malignant fate seemed to hover over those delectable and inoffensive articles of food.

As the first batch was ready for the frying-pan her eyes, which had been constantly straying towards the river, beheld a canoe coming up-stream towards the camp. It was manned by two men; and the white rolls

of foam on either side of the sharp bow showed that it was being forced ahead at top speed.

"There is Angus back," she thought with relief and thankfulness.

She hurried down to the river-bank to receive the arrivals. As the canoe drew nearer she discovered to her amaze, however, that the occupants of the canoe were Corporal Wilson, whom she had met at Portage Bend, and an unknown half-breed.

As soon as Wilson became aware of the girl on the river-bank he waved his hand; and then applied himself to his paddle with renewed efforts.

Soon the canoe grated on the beach, and the two occupants climbed out.

"How-do-you-do, Miss Elliott? And how is Weston?" was Wilson's hurried greeting.

"He is much better, thank you. I was rather worried last night. He had a kind of fever, and was very delirious; but to-day he seems quite normal again. He is very weak, of course, though he doesn't seem to realize it. I hope he is asleep now, so we had better not speak too loudly."

"That's excellent news! We got awfully worried when we met Angus down south and heard all about the affair. We have travelled as hard and fast as we could to warn Weston; but of course it was just our luck to arrive too late," he ended a little bitterly.

"To warn him?" ejaculated Betty, surprised. "Did you know this was going to happen, then?"

"We didn't exactly know it was going to happen; but we had suspicions that something might happen if I didn't get to Weston in time. You see the . . . the . . ." he floundered and broke off. He was going to say "the late lamented," but decided at the last moment that, under the circumstances, it might be considered a mite too frivolous and lacking in delicacy. So he continued along another line. "You see, that Indian was a dangerous homicidal maniac. He hails from Lac du Broche. After he had made determined efforts to deplete the population up there for some time, he killed a constable who was sent up to gather him in. Then Weston got busy."

"Oh, yes. He told me all about it one day," interposed Betty.

"Oh, did he?" inquired Wilson, regret in his voice. He liked telling a story, and felt abused because Weston had forestalled him with at least part of the epic. "Anyhow, after Weston had got him, the Indian seemed to have taken violent objection to old Wess. Why, Lord only knows. Because Weston treated him like his own brother. Weston always treats his prisoners that way. It's a real pleasure to be arrested by him, I have heard tell. Even hardened, confirmed murderers of the lowest order he treats like lost sheep; and I strongly suspect him of shedding manly tears on the day of their sudden demise. However, to proceed with my tale of woe. In the asylum at Prince Albert the Indian spent most of his leisure hours raving about Weston, and impressing on his surroundings all the pleasant things he would do to the red-coat if he ever got hold of him. Well, five days after you had left we got a message from Prince Albert informing us that Weston's chum had flown the cage. And those fool officials at the asylum started hunting for him on their own at first, without warning our people at once. It was not till four days after the escape had taken place that the glad news was imparted to our Headquarters. Our chaps in Prince Albert got busy at once. They soon discovered that a canoe, a rifle, ammunition, and some grub had disappeared from the neighbourhood about the time the fellow had been playing the disappearing act. Putting two and two together, they soon came to the conclusion that the fellow was heading for home; and we immediately got instructions to head him off and bring him back.

"When old Trenchy—that's Inspector Trench, you know—heard about it, he went up in the air, and hit the ceiling with a 'bang!' It was the gun and ammunition that got his goat. It didn't take any sixth sense to divine that there would be fireworks if the lunatic should happen to fall in with your party. And if he first started shooting there was no telling where he would stop. So old Trenchy sent me and Alec

Chaboye there "—he waved his hand towards his companion, who was unloading their canoe—" hot foot on your trail to try and head off the fellow; or, at least, to warn Wess that his friend was crowding the trail. We travelled as fast as we could; but, of course, had to arrive too late after all," he ended lugubriously.

" Anyhow," he started again more cheerfully, " thanks to Angus's keen nose, the tragedy was kept within reasonable bounds."

" Angus's nose? " repeated Betty, surprised. " What has that got to do with it? "

" Didn't Angus tell you about his part of the affair? "

" No. You see, there were such a lot of other things to do; so I forgot to ask him about it."

" Well, he told me all about it when I met him. He said he had smelt burning wood as you were crossing the lake south of here; and as he didn't see any signs of any fire, he got curious and suspicious. Indians are funny that way. They simply must get to the bottom of things that don't seem quite natural to them. And so he scouted around after you had pitched camp that night. He nosed about along the river; found an empty canoe drawn up on the beach; and, scenting danger, he beat all records back to the camp. Just on the fringe of this clearing he saw a fellow standing behind a tree with a rifle to his shoulder. Angus quickly raised his own gun; but the other chap beat him to the firing by a few seconds. But Angus, luckily, got him. It was a fine snap-shot of Angus's, everything considered. He got the chap right through the heart," he commented appreciatively, not noticing the girl's shudder. " Well, the rest you know. But isn't it funny, though, how trouble always seems to gravitate towards Weston? " he ended reflectively. " He seems to draw it like a magnet. Even when he was holidaying up at Clear Water Lake he managed to poke his head into a wasps' nest. Only, as things turned out, he did most of the stinging."

" What happened at Clear Water Lake? " inquired Betty, her curiosity aroused.

" That is a long, sad tale," grinned Wilson. " I'll

tell it to you to-night when we congregate around the camp-fire. It needs careful setting and comfort to do full justice to it. But one thing about your adventure struck me as funny. It seems that Weston was caught napping; and he is generally very wide awake."

"He wasn't caught napping!" defended Betty. "I saw he was uneasy about Angus's mysterious movements. He tried to hide it from me; but I caught his eyes searching the woods all the time we were talking. I know he saw the man before he shot. Because, without warning, he suddenly gave me a shove with his hand that sent me sprawling. I thought he had gone off his head at first; but when the shot came I understood. He was afraid that the bullet might hit me, and pushed me out of the way. Oh, it was sickening," she ended with a shudder. "I heard a dull thud just before the report from the rifle reached me; and the sergeant crumpled up and dropped to the ground."

"That thud was the bullet striking," explained Wilson gratis, eager to make everything quite clear.

"I understood that," she shuddered. "It was ghastly! At first I thought the sergeant had been killed."

"Weston isn't killed as easy as that," protested Wilson. "It has been tried before with indifferent success. It would be harder to kill old Wess than it would be to lay the dust of the Sahara with a sprinkling-can, or to convert a Kentucky moonshiner by sicking on to him a New England temperance lecturer. It can't be did!"

Betty smiled.

"For an Englishman you seem to have a fine grip on American idioms."

"I learnt that one from a Yankee prisoner," grinned Wilson. "And, as I considered it hot stuff, I stored it up for future use. But I never had a chance to spiel it to anybody till now," he regretted. "But to return to Wess. You are quite sure that he is out of danger?"

"Almost quite sure. I was very worried when he was so delirious last night; but this morning the fever

seems to have left him entirely. He should be all right, if he will only take proper care of himself. And we'll see to it that he does," she ended firmly.

"We certainly will! Could I have a peek at him, do you think?"

"I suppose so, if you will promise to be quiet, so you don't waken him up."

"I'll be quieter than a mouse! I'll first tell Alec to make some grub; it must be close on feeding time." Suddenly a thought struck him. "Good Lord!" he cried, dismayed. "Here I have kept you standing about while I have been shooting my fool mouth off all this time. I ought to have had the sense and decency to make you sit down somewhere before I started this pow-wow. Please excuse me!"

"Don't worry," she laughed. "I am not an invalid; so it hasn't hurt me one bit."

"Whatever you say, it was awfully rude and thoughtless of me," he said penitently. "Anyhow, I gave Angus beans for leaving you alone up here," he continued, going off on a tangent.

"Why?" demanded Betty. "It was the only sensible thing to do!"

"I suppose so," he grudgingly admitted. "But it got my goat at the time. Anyhow, I don't think it broke Angus up. He didn't exactly tell me to go to some hot climate; but he looked it! But you have got a fine champion in Angus, I can tell you. He was chirping your praise loudly and enthusiastically. And that is saying some. Because Angus's pet expression of abusive disdain towards the world in general was heretofore: 'White squaw!' I bet he'll change his record now."

They both laughed, and commenced to stroll towards the tent. On their way Wilson gave Alec the necessary instructions about preparing a meal, and to be quiet about it. Betty also, with a smile, begged him to give the soda-biscuits their long deferred chance. And Alec nodded and grinned.

When Betty had parted the tent-flaps and had stuck her head inside, she found Weston awake.

"Hello!" he grinned. "Did I hear the gentle

murmur of voices on the breeze, or did I only dream it?"

"You heard it," rejoined Betty. "Here is a visitor for you."

She entered the tent closely followed by Wilson.

"Hello, Wess!" greeted the latter with a smile.

"Well! Well! If here ain't little 'Erb right amongst us!" grinned Weston; and Wilson winced. It was the lasting sorrow and regret of his life that he had been endowed with the baptismal names William Herbert. He considered the name Herbert a blot on an otherwise spotless escutcheon; and was, consequently, rather touchy on the subject.

"Shut up, you chump!" he growled. "There isn't much the matter with you when you start being personal and insulting. But I must say that for you: you have a positive genius for getting into messes. What you want is a nurse-maid!"

"I heartily agree with you! Perhaps my little 'Erb will try and qualify for the job? Anyhow, how did you come to join this picnic?"

Wilson briefly explained.

"Well, your turning up simplifies matters," remarked Weston, when the corporal had finished. "Now you can take Miss Elliott up to the Narrows as soon as Angus returns."

"Of course, with pleasure," agreed Wilson promptly.

But Miss Elliott, as it proved, was not at all in positive favour of the suggestion; and wasted no time in correcting their error.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Wilson!" she said firmly. "I am going to stay right here and look after him. He has shown signs of rebellion already; and it needs a person with a firm hand, whom he knows he can't bully, to look after him. Angus would be a broken reed. He would be wheedled around in a moment. So I am going to stay till it is safe to let him run loose alone. That's flat—and final!"

"But say," expostulated Weston, "it's up to us to get you to the Narrows as soon as possible."

"Don't you worry about that," answered Betty unfeelingly. "There is no hurry at all. I am going to stay with my sister and Allan all winter, so they'll have plenty of time to get tired of me as it is. When Angus gets back with his Indians, we'll send somebody up to Beaver Narrows for them, and they can come down and fetch me. A little trip won't do them any harm. Don't you agree that the arrangement is the only sensible thing?" she appealed to Wilson.

"Oh, well. Of course, it's up to you. I am quite willing to take you up there. But if you choose to stay and play nurse-maid to that big chump, I can't force you away," he grinned. "Anyhow," he continued with an official touch, "I really ought to get down to Portage Bend as quickly as possible and report this affair. The inspector might feel anxious. So as soon as Angus returns I'll take the depositions of all of you; and then go straight down and have this mess officially settled and buried. That is, of course, if you are really determined to stay, Miss Elliott."

"I said so, and I am!" she smiled.

Weston was still inclined to demur; but his expostulations lacked force and conviction. And at last he accepted the situation with outward protest; but inward satisfaction.

"Well," said Betty, when all was settled, "I am going out to help—Alec, wasn't it?—to prepare grub. I'll leave you to entertain the patient, Mr. Wilson. But remember, Dick, you are not to talk too much."

"All right, Betty, I'll promise to be good. Anyhow, there isn't much chance for anybody to get a word in edgeways when Wilson is around."

Wilson let the base insinuation pass. He had pricked up his ears at the free and easy use of Christian names. He had no clue to the simple explanation of the phenomenon, and, consequently, romantic notions began to riot in his head. He had always considered Weston as a rank outsider when it came to girls; but this seemed to indicate that Weston could be a quick worker when given a chance. He

pursed up his mouth as if to whistle as the girl left the tent; but luckily he managed to suppress in time such an indiscreet and unseemly exhibition of surprise.

The preparations for the meal were nearly completed, and Miss Elliott and Alec had been fast improving their acquaintance, when Wilson emerged from the tent and joined them by the fire. He wore an aggrieved air, and at once commenced voicing his grouch.

"Now, I ask you! Isn't that the limit? I was telling Wess a story, one of the best that ever happened; and right in the middle of it, I discovered that he had rudely dropped off to sleep! Absolutely dropped off to sleep! I mean, it shows beastly little consideration for me; and I was telling the story well at that," he complained.

"Never mind," laughed Betty. "You can save it up for another time, when he is in a fit state to be stirred up with a kick if he shows signs of flagging. A little sleep won't do him any harm just now. Lunch is ready, so sit down and forget your troubles."

Wilson grinned and complied with alacrity.

"What's Weston going to eat?" he inquired when the keen edge had been taken off his appetite. The mellowing influence of the food had filled him with a kindly interest in mankind.

"Oatmeal soup."

"Gosh!" he ejaculated, staring. "Nothing but that? That's no food for a human being. Give him some of these fried sausages," he suggested generously. "They are a favourite dish of his."

"I don't dare to," smiled the nurse. "Angus gave strict orders to give him nothing else but the soup."

"Oh, well. If Angus said so, I suppose it'll have to stick," he said resignedly. "Angus is quite an expert at treating gunshot-wounds. And, besides, I don't dare interfere between him and his baby chick. He would pick my eyes out if I did."

"Angus seems very fond of the sergeant."

"Fond is not the word," snorted Wilson. "Angus considers old Wess a kind of improved specimen of

super-god. And Wess thinks no end of Angus. And Angus is really a fine fellow, isn't that so, Alec?"

"Dam' fine!" agreed that worthy through an ample mouthful of victuals.

When they had finished their meal the corporal and Alec put up their tent, and Miss Elliott's things were moved into this; while Wilson appropriated the place vacated by her in the other tent.

Angus returned the next morning with an extra canoe and three Indians. The extra canoe was at once despatched to Beaver Narrows manned by two of the Indians, who were instructed to travel at top speed. Betty sent a note with them, briefly explaining the circumstances to the Gunns.

The third Indian was to remain in the camp as Angus's assistant.

Wilson now took down the evidence in writing of the three surviving actors in the affair, and had them each sign their depositions. This procedure particularly pleased Angus, whose only accomplishment as a penman was to be able to scrawl a sprawling "A. MacKenzie," with much labour and a wealth of facial contortions. And he never got tired of giving exhibitions of his proficiency.

Wilson and Alec then departed. The former left his tent at the camp, and he also promised to arrange to have some needed supplies sent up to them from the nearest trading-post.

"Gosh!" soliloquized Wilson, as he waved his hand for the last time to the girl just before the camp got hidden from view behind a point. "Isn't old Wess a fool for luck? Now, if this had happened to me, I'll bet that at the best I should have found an old dirty squaw around me to nurse me. And there is Weston, who never bothered about skirts, having this peach of a girl flung at him, so to speak. And me having worked overtime to try and click with a decent girl for ages is left out in the cold. It ain't fair," he ended his moan, getting careless with his language in his strong emotion.

Those left at the camp now settled down to wait.

Angus took over the position as valet to the patient, with Miss Elliott acting as nurse-in-chief.

She was far from feeling time hanging heavily on her hands. Between looking after the patient, and quelling his attempts at mutiny, which grew more frequent as he gained in strength, she helped with the cooking, and also assisted in setting and lifting their fish-nets. And she felt the days slip rapidly by. The weather also was mostly favourable. They were visited by a few rainstorms; but they were so short and far between that they did not particularly incommode them.

Weston's progress towards recovery was sure but slow. Nearly a fortnight had rolled by before Angus, as surgeon-in-chief, gave the disgusted patient permission to leave his bunk. But after he had been permitted to move around, his strong, healthy constitution soon conquered any lingering rest of weakness. Betty and he used to roam around in the woods near the camp; and by the time the Gunns arrived in great haste from Beaver Narrows, he was so far recovered that Allan Gunn's intended solicitude towards the supposed sufferer changed to frank disgust.

"Gosh!" he snorted as he climbed out of the canoe. "Here we have been about breaking our backs getting here, and have been loading the canoe with crape, expecting to find a corpse; and instead we find you looking like a million dollars! And those poor misguided Injuns you sent up arrived as physical wrecks, having imagined in their simplicity that it was a case of urgency! You are both frauds! I don't think you were shot at all, Wess. I strongly suspect that you two wanted to have a picnic, and thought you would drag us into it under false pretences!"

"Huh!" growled Angus pugnaciously, rising up in arms to defend his chick. "If you shot like sergeant, you be kicking toes in air by now!" What Angus meant to convey was that if Gunn had been as severely wounded as had the sergeant he would have turned up his toes. He was very fond of using

white man's similes. That he generally made verbal hash of them in no way detracted from his delight and pride in proving his supreme mastery of the English language.

"Hello, you old pepper-pot! Did that get under your skin too?" grinned Gunn.

"That's right, Angus," smiled Mrs. Gunn her approval. "You just see him off! Are you really as well as you look, Dick?"

"Much better," grinned the invalid. "You see, I have been well looked after. Your sister and Angus have been fussing over me as if I were an infant in arms."

"Well, so you are!" rejoined Mrs. Gunn smartly. "All men are, for that matter, when you get down to cases. Well, Betty, my dear," she continued, embracing her sister. "It is good to see you again. But it was a funny welcome you got. Anyhow, you seem to have behaved amazingly well for a cheechako; even though I say it, who shouldn't."

"What else did you expect?" interposed Gunn in frank surprise. "She is your sister, ain't she?" At which open, ingenuous, husbandly compliment Mrs. Gunn blushed like a seventeen-year-old.

"Don't talk nonsense, Allan," she reproved sternly. "Now listen all of you to words of wisdom. Now we have got here, we might as well enjoy a picnic for some days. I left Tootles," the *nom de guerre* of her two years old son, "with his Indian nurse, who is capable, trustworthy, and a dear. And, besides, I bundled them both over to Bill Jennings'." That gentleman was the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Beaver Narrows; Gunn's keen competitor, implacable business enemy, and staunch friend. "I gave Bill strict orders to look after the two during our absence. He was frightfully keen to come with us at first; but when he learnt that he was to have Tootles to keep him company, he promptly changed his mind. He's crazy about that kid, and does his level best to ruin him. Now we'll all stay here for five days and enjoy ourselves. I don't dare stay any longer, for fear of finding Tootles' morals

wrecked past redemption and repair on our return. All in favour of the plan?"

They were!

And the picnic proved a success. They roamed the woods, went fishing on the river, and took longer outings in the canoes. On all canoe-trips Weston, as behoved an invalid, filled the rôle as passenger; to his unspeakable disgust and against his lusty protests, which latter were mere waste of breath.

But, somehow, Weston did not feel entirely happy. And as the day of parting rapidly approached he grew more and more thoughtful. Even Allan Gunn noticed this, and commented on it.

"Say, I don't think Wess is all there yet," he confided to his partner in life. "He doesn't seem as chirpy as he used to by a long shot. I guess that shooting took more pep out of him than we thought." On which remark his wise and observant wife advised him not to be a chump, further, to try and cultivate a less slangy mode of expression, and, finally, to run away and play and not bother her. Whereupon Allan obediently went, scratching his head in perplexity.

Weston was floundering in deep waters. The poignant feeling of regret at the thought of Betty's forthcoming departure had not been needed to convince him that his feelings for her had passed the stage of friendship and admiration, and had developed into something far stronger. He had long since shamelessly confessed to himself that he loved her. And he wondered what her feelings were with regard to him.

Of course, he told himself several times during each day, the straightforward, obvious course to pursue would be to ask her straight out; but here he found himself up against a blank wall. He, who was famed for an almost brutal directness, for once fell a prey to vacillation and compromise. His heart simply quailed at the mere thought of facing Betty with his confession.

The fond characteristic of him as obligingly sketched by Miss Morgan up at Clear Water had not a little to do with his trepidation. Perhaps Betty considered

him in the same light, only she was too kind to advertise the fact. He knew so little about girls, and still less about the particular endowments they expected in a suitor. But whatever these endowments were, he had the sickly conviction that he did not possess them.

After all, what had he to offer any girl? He frankly admitted that taking everything into consideration, he was not much of an egg. He was, of course, well off; but that was about his only asset, and not much of an asset at that according to his views. On the other hand, he was much older than Betty. She could not be more than nineteen or twenty; and that would make him her senior by the tremendous gulf of ten years. She must regard him as about middle-aged, was his bitter observation at this point in his profound meditations. Further, he had to confess that his position in the social world was rather humble. Personally, that consideration did not bother him; but he was afraid that social position was a matter that ranked very prominently with a girl. And he had to admit that it was not a particularly dazzling prospect to dangle before any girl, to become Mrs. Sergeant, and be tied to a man who might have to leave home at a moment's notice to chase around to the various points of the compass for months at a time. He might even be posted to a place so far north that it would be impossible to bring a wife along with him. Herschell Island for instance, picking about the extreme edge to give proper weight and perspective to his argument. And, besides, the authorities frowned on matrimonial aspirations in the rank and file. They did not exactly obstruct them; but they, at least, did what they could to discourage them. Up to now he had been in hearty agreement with their attitude, had found it entirely sound; but now his conviction began to waver. If a fellow wanted to get married that was his look-out; and had nothing to do with the old fogeys at Headquarters, he thought rather hotly.

Oh no, he sighed lugubriously, his case was absolutely hopeless! At present he was really not

in a position to ask of any girl to share his life. But, nevertheless, he had hopes for the future. It was not as if Betty was passing out of his life for ever, he argued earnestly. He would be able to see her up at Beaver Narrows during the winter, when patrols took him that way. And he would see to it that patrols did! And, anyhow, she would be passing through Portage Bend on her way out next spring. And in the meantime something might have turned up, he thought vaguely and optimistically.

However, before she left he really ought to give her a hint at least, as to the state of his heart, he pondered. He even went so far as to fashion in his mind the right and proper things to say to Betty. But every time he got so far his doubts began to assert themselves afresh—and the merry-go-round was in full blast again.

The suggestion that all his lofty arguments were only a cloak to cover his own diffidence and cowardice, and that the whole trouble with him was that he was in a blue funk, he would have refuted with considerable vim and energy. He would in all probability have contended that it was his rugged common sense which urged him to discretion, and not cowardice which spurred on his common sense to brilliant efforts.

No, Weston was not happy!

And as he was wrestling with his problem—getting nowhere—the days rolled by; and eventually the last day arrived. Early next morning the Gunns and Betty were to pull out for Beaver Narrows.

Towards evening of that last day Gunn and Angus's Indian assistant had gone to lift the nets; while Mrs. Gunn, assisted by Angus, commenced to prepare supper. She had threatened to show them what camp-cooking could be really like; and was now preparing to carry her threat into execution.

She commenced operations by banishing her sister and Weston from the camp on the plea that their presence distracted her from her earnest culinary endeavours.

The two tramped around in the woods for a while, and gradually drifted down towards the river bank;

where they eventually came to anchor on a windfall, which formed a not uncomfortable seat.

The flow of conversation was neither particularly bright nor smooth. Both seemed preoccupied.

"Well, to-morrow will be the end of the picnic," observed Weston presently.

"Yes," agreed his companion. "It seems funny that to-morrow we'll all be scattered again."

"Funny" was not exactly the word Weston would have chosen; but he nodded his agreement.

"Anyhow, Betty," he continued, "I can never thank you enough for what you have done for me. You have been no end of a brick. Staying alone up here in the wilderness with me, nursing me and all that. There are not many who would have done it."

"Don't be absurd, Dick!" laughed Betty. "What I did was nothing. The least I could do was to look after you a little when you got hurt. You seem to have overlooked the little fact that if it hadn't been for me, you would not have got shot up at all. It is I who have to thank you for coming to my assistance down at Portage Bend. It was really sweet of you to volunteer so promptly as rescuer of a poor damsel in distress."

"Now you are talking rot," retorted Weston elegantly and determinedly. "I owed your sister and Allan to get you up to the Narrows; and, anyhow, I would have been a poor kind of a specimen of a man if I hadn't tried to help you out, even if there had not been that consideration. And, besides, I wouldn't have missed this trip for anything. It has been one of the finest trips I ever had, even though that poor lunatic spoilt it a bit. I'll miss you a whole lot when you are gone," he ended with a boldness which surprised himself.

"Will you, Dick?" asked Betty softly, looking at him out of the corner of her eye. "But you'll come up and see us soon, and you'll write occasionally to let us know how you are getting along, won't you?"

"Of course, I'll come; and, of course, I'll write!" cried Weston eagerly. Some quality in his companion's voice made him for the moment forget his

diffidence and trepidation; he took the bit between his teeth and plunged ahead regardlessly: "And Betty, I want to . . ."

"Hey, you two!" came an excited hail from the river. Weston broke off his piece abruptly; two pairs of startled eyes turned towards the source of the uproar; and they discovered a canoe, making straight for the bank, in which were seated Allan Gunn and the Indian. The former was waving an agitated hand in the air. "Say!" continued Gunn his happy bellowing. "Come down and look at the whopper of a sturgeon I found in the far net! I bet you it's more than five feet long! About the heftiest sturgeon I ever clapped my eyes on!"

Allan Gunn was about Weston's best friend; but at the moment he felt that it would have been unalloyed pleasure to gloat over Allan's corpse. Just as he had keyed himself up to regardless recklessness that idiot of a chump had to come along with his infernal chirping about a dashed sturgeon and trample on the whole thing! Oh, hell!

Reluctantly he got up from the log and followed Betty down to the beach, mentally building up a veritable chamber of horrors of the things he wished would happen to Allan; when his brains were not busy fashioning silent, potent, comprehensive and indiscriminate curses against Allan, canoes and sturgeons.

And to add insult to injury he had duly to admire the "whopper," while his whole system was overcharged with homicidal yearnings.

"Say! You two climb into the canoe, and we'll lug you back to camp. It's near feeding time, anyhow," invited Gunn, who was filled with the milk of human kindness towards all mankind, after he had finished a triumphant dissertation on the virtues and prominent features of his catch.

Both accepted the invitation. Weston, principally, because his morale had been so effectually shattered that he did not have the heart to rebel. He knew the spell had been broken, and that the shining hour of opportunity was hopelessly lost and gone.

When they arrived at the camp Mrs. Gunn took less

interest in her jubilant lord and master and his whopper than she did in her sister and Weston. She was very fond of them both, and had cherished certain hopes which she fondly expected to be fulfilled before the picnic broke up. But her keen eyes detected that all was not well with the objects of her solicitude; and she wondered. But she was enlightened. She was a lady with a keen imagination and intuition; and when her husband in the seclusion of their tent that night, prompted by a few leading questions from her, innocently related how he had stirred up the two of them when they had been sitting on a log like two lost souls, looking silly—so he described it—she put two and two together; and soon had about the right addition. And be it said here as a sop to the vindictive-minded, she promptly held up for her husband's inspection, such a lurid word-picture of himself, that it surprised him.

However, Weston soon got himself in hand again. He held a lightning-review of his phalanx of common-sense arguments; and at the finish he was inclined to consider Allan's intervention as being for the best. If the fool hadn't butted in when he did, he, the sergeant, might have messed up everything by being too precipitous and premature, and might have made no end of an ass of himself. And his sentiments towards Gunn consequently softened. He even went so far as to retract some of his most fruity wishes for that gentleman's ultimate fate. And he commenced to feel a little better.

The evening eventually proved a success. Mrs. Gunn vindicated to the full her claim to be a culinary artist of no mean order; and after the various objects of her art had been well and truly sampled, all was once more harmony and good-will.

At eight o'clock on the following morning the last of the Gunns' bundles had been packed away in their canoe, and they stood ready to depart.

Weston felt like a sick calf, and had to wrestle hard so as not to look like one. And, consequently, he displayed almost indecently high spirits.

But when he said good-bye to Betty—who, by the way, also seemed to be unusually bright and vivacious

on that morning—he had to struggle hard to keep himself in hand. And so they took leave of each other with a quite frivolous gaiety, which did not deceive Mrs. Gunn, who was watching them with an amused and satisfied smile.

"Well, Dick," she remarked as Weston turned to her and grabbed her hand, "I suppose you will find your way up to the Narrows some time this winter?"

"Oh, yes. He has promised already," interposed her sister cheerfully. "He has also promised to write to us occasionally."

"Ha! ha! Weston write!" laughed Gunn derisively. "I'd like to see it! Up to now, he has only written when there was no way around it; and then the effort used to make him sore as a wet cat. He is famed for it. Gosh, if Wess starts writing letters voluntarily, he must be reformed or something, I'll tell the world!"

The harassed Weston found Gunn's observation so grossly tactless under the circumstances that his foot itched to get in one healthy kick; but as that satisfying procedure was out of the question, he forced a sickly grin, and muttered some inane remark about "even the worst of us changing our ways."

Mrs. Gunn shared Weston's opinion about the remark, and she directed towards the offender a glance which made him look extremely self-conscious and feel worse.

At last the whole party had climbed into their canoe, and pushed off. Soon the little craft disappeared around the first bend up the river. Three hands had waved to Weston just before they rounded the point; but he had only eyes for one of them.

The sun was shining brightly, and there was a pleasant tang and cheerful hum of late summer in the air; but if anybody at that moment had said to Weston that it was a dull, bleak day, he would promptly have answered: "Yes," and meant it.

For a long time he stood staring at the spot where he had last seen the canoe, calling himself uncomplimentary names. He rapidly rehearsed in his mind all the things he ought to have said and done; but had not.

And, somehow, his usual arguments seemed to have lost some of their magic power. For one wild moment he felt a strong impulse to chase after the others, get hold of Betty and tell her everything; but almost in the same breath he had the dismal conviction that the impulse was sheer bluff.

At last he roused himself, and turned away with a heavy sigh.

"Angus!" he shouted. "Get all our things packed and stowed in the canoe. We leave at once!" He did not want to stay at this camp with its memories for longer than he could help.

"Good!" answered Angus. And he and the Indian immediately commenced dismantling the camp. The Indian was going with them all the way to Portage Bend, as Weston was as yet not fit enough to take any appreciable share in the tasks of the trail.

The packing was quickly effectuated; and soon their canoe shot down the river.

And the camp, which for a time had been the stage for some of life's tragedies and comedies, lay forsaken and deserted in its forest fastness. The spruce-beds, left on the ground, and the blackened site of the fire only served to accentuate the cold, cheerless, deserted aspect of the place.

## CHAPTER XVI

As soon as Weston arrived at Portage Junction he again took up his duties.

Summer faded into fall; and soon winter held the country in its icy grip. And still Weston's eagerly anticipated patrol to Beaver Narrows had not materialized. And, moreover, it seemed as far off as ever. A lot of work had kept him tied to the town during the fall and early winter; and in November Inspector Trench was called to Prince Albert to fill a temporary vacancy,

while Weston was left in charge of the Detachment. He chafed at the delay; and mournfully told himself that if Betty thought of him at all, she would be sure to forget him if he did not get up and see her soon.

Of course he had managed to write her a few letters. He had organized a veritable spy-service to keep him informed about prospective departures towards Beaver Narrows. And to those departing travellers, red and white, he entrusted his letters with strict injunctions—backed up with appropriate threats—to see that they were safely delivered.

Accompanying his letters to Betty like a Siamese Twin was invariably one for the Gunns. He was afraid that writing to the girl, only, might appear too pointed, and might excite comment, amused or otherwise. He could almost see Allan Gunn discuss the subject, with great gusto and vast grins, with their mutual friend Bill Jennings. So he decided to play safe.

But letters were not the same as presenting himself in person, he assured himself dolefully. He simply could not get the letters interesting, and he failed hopelessly in introducing into them the right personal touch. They always appeared to him cold and impersonal, more like official reports. He often wished that he could drink out of the fountain of Wilson's experience. That gentleman was considered somewhat of an expert in such matters.

On one occasion he had attempted to give a letter a more personal and warm touch; but the result had appalled him. He had quickly torn up the effort; and had felt foolish for the rest of that day. No, he sighed, he simply had to get up there; and when he got there, *he would speak!* That, he decided bravely, was his course, whatever the consequences.

At long last the inspector returned; and Weston at once commenced to point out to him, earnestly and convincingly, the advisableness of sending somebody up to the Beaver Narrows district to look into conditions up there. He further volunteered, with becoming modesty and indifference, to undertake the arduous patrol himself. The inspector, unsuspicious of guile in his subordinate, shared his views; and the trip was

about settled when a bomb burst. And again Weston's plans were thrown into hopeless confusion. Around Christmas-time Weston, much to his surprise, found himself promoted to an inspectorship, with orders to take over the prairie station at Lethbridge at once.

But his delight in his promotion was almost crushed at the thought that now his trip to Beaver Narrows must remain a fond dream only. And, what was even worse, he would not be on the spot when Betty returned from Beaver Narrows. Fate certainly seemed to hand him some nasty knocks, he sighed a little unreasonably.

He promptly dispatched his usual twin letters to Beaver Narrows, and sent them up with Angus, specially employed for the purpose. He acquainted them with his good fortune, at the same time informing them, with manly regrets, that it would now be impossible for him to pay the promised visit. He would have liked to enlarge on the subject in the one half of the twins, but refrained. He frankly admitted the task hopelessly beyond him.

He arrived at Lethbridge in a state of gentle melancholy; and his new surroundings did not help revive his drooping spirits. He found the little prairie town unutterably dull; and totally lacking in scope for his restless energies. And, besides, he missed the North with its deep, free forests; its lakes and rivers; and its general untrammelled freedom.

Shortly after he had arrived at Lethbridge he received a shock. A letter from England acquainted him with the death of his cousin, who had broken his neck in the hunting field. The shock was not so much caused by the sad demise of his cousin. That gentleman, an officer in the Guards, had principally made himself famed for his high-pressure standard of living, and had been a constant source of trouble and disappointment to his father. So he felt that the world could quite well jog along without his cousin. But it was the fact that his cousin's death made him the heir to his uncle, the Earl of Ernemount, which caused the dark frown to gather on Weston's brow when he received the news.

He had no ambition to be heir to any earl. He was getting on exceedingly well in his chosen profession. An inspector at thirty, he stood an excellent chance of eventually reaching the higher grades of the service. Even Chief Commissioner was not absolutely outside the bounds of the probable, he told himself cheerfully and modestly. So he had no inclination or desire to give up a promising career for any earldom. And his thoughts about his late cousin for being so careless as to getting himself killed were somewhat unreasonable, and not at all quite the right and proper thoughts about a dead man. But, then, Weston was bitter, and, consequently, inclined to be unreasonable.

But gradually his reflections turned into a more optimistic and sanguine channel. His uncle had not yet filled sixty years of age, and was hale and sound. True, he was a widower. But there was no earthly reason why he should not remarry. It was simply his duty to marry again, continued Weston his earnest argument, and secure a succession in the direct line. Even if this natural and logical procedure did not occur to his uncle independently, he, Weston, was going to point out the path of duty to him in a few tactful and well-chosen words!

Having thus, theoretically at least, disposed of the future of the Earldom of Ernemount to his satisfaction, he felt in a more cheerful frame of mind.

He spent the following winter and spring down at Lethbridge; but towards the end of the following May a minor upheaval took place in the Police. One of the Assistant Commissioners retired; the superintendent at Prince Albert was promoted Assistant Commissioner; and Weston's late officer commanding at Portage Bend, Inspector Trench, was promoted to the vacant superintendentship at Prince Albert.

Superintendent Trench's first official act in his new position had been to secure the services of his late trusted sergeant for his division; and so Weston, to his immense satisfaction, found himself transferred back to Portage Bend as officer in charge of the Detachment.

He found, somewhat to his relief, that most of his old comrades in the detachment had been sent elsewhere. The only remaining one was Wilson, now a sergeant. The altered situation between the erstwhile chums was felt by both to be a little embarrassing at first. Weston felt like an ass when Wilson clicked to attention and addressed him as "sir"; but by both exercising the utmost tact the changed relations soon adjusted themselves and became normal.

But otherwise bad luck seemed to stick to Weston like a burr. About the first news which had met him on his eager return to Portage Bend was that Betty had passed through the town a few days previously on her way back to Toronto. He also found a letter from her, in which she expressed her disappointment at missing him, and further informed him that she had to go back to Toronto to attend the wedding of a girl friend. But, she finished up, it was quite probable that she might go back to Beaver Narrows later in the summer; and she looked forward to seeing him then.

This cheered him for a while; but not for long. He did not quite relish the term "quite probable." It sounded too vague and indefinite. And, besides, back in Toronto she would be among her own friends, and surrounded by goodness knows how many eager swains, all prepared to improve each shining hour. Of all, this thought was the most distressing. Up at Beaver Narrows the coast had been clear. There was, of course, Bill Jennings, who was a bachelor; but he was past forty, lazy, and indifferent to girls, so Weston had ruled him out of the game from the start.

But this was different; and in the panicky state of his harassed mind he conjured up an awe-inspiring picture of about all the lads of Toronto making a concerted rush towards Betty, each loaded down with offers of marriage!

After this gruesome picture, with variations, had haunted him for a few days, he finally decided that he had to do something. And he did it. He made up

his mind to write a letter to Betty and unburden his heart.

How many draughts were penned before the letter was eventually written is not on record; but there was enough paper used to have kept the Salvation Army in material for tracts during quite a period of time. For about two days he struggled manfully, tearing up effort after effort in disgust. He simply could not fashion those smooth, alluringly-emotional sentences which he deemed essential. Either the efforts were mere slush, or else they appeared like effusions from a third-rate poet who had been on a drunk for weeks, he thought savagely.

At last, in desperation, he gave up all attempts at artistic composition. To-day was mail-day; and he wanted to get the letter off without further delay. He therefore rapidly indited a straightforward, simple letter, in which he stated in a few sentences, without any embellishments, that he loved her, and would she marry him. Not daring a further critical review of his effort he hurriedly jabbed it into an envelope, sealed and addressed it, stuck on a stamp, and rapidly walked across to the post office.

When the letter struck the bottom of the letter-box with a dull thud of finality he felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach; and for one panicky moment he felt strongly tempted to get Banting to open the box and return him his letter. But he dared not for fear of making himself appear ridiculous. As it was he felt not a little self-conscious, and in addition he had the morbid feeling that he was the cynosure of every eye in town. He turned abruptly away from the letter-box and threw rapid, austere glances around him; but discovered to his relief that the citizens in sight were walking quietly and sedately about without taking any undue notice of him.

To Weston the world revolved more smoothly and evenly after he had got the letter off his chest. He had figured out the approximate date when he could expect an answer, and he was, of course, anxiously looking forward to what that day would bring; but at the same time he experienced the smug placidity and

satisfaction of the fatalist, who assures himself that he has done all in his power, and that the issue now lies in the hands of the gods.

A few mornings later he received two surprises. The first was lying on top of his mail when he arrived at the office in the morning. It was enclosed in an envelope bearing the New York stamp, and addressed to him in an unknown, bold, but unmistakably, female hand. As he picked up the envelope he shot a suspicious look across the office at Sergeant Wilson, shrewdly suspecting him of having placed the missive on top of the pile with fixed purpose and intent; but the suspect seemed to be engrossed in his work.

Idly speculating on the identity of the sender, he slit the envelope open, and extracted the letter he found inside. He folded it out, turned it over, and glanced at the signature: "Marion Morgan." He nearly whistled his surprise.

"Now what the . . ." he muttered to himself. And with knitted eyebrows and a half scowl on his face, he commenced to read the communication.

"Dear Mr. Weston," it ran, "We were all so delighted to hear about your promotion." Now, how did they come to hear about that? soliloquized Weston. "We have often been talking about you; and have been recalling the adventurous, though delightful days we spent up at Clear Water Lake.

"I am afraid you thought me a little rude and abrupt that last evening we spent together on the lake; but at the time I was annoyed, and I am afraid I lost my temper." Weston grinned broadly. She did! With a vengeance! "But afterwards I realized that you had been right; and I decided to tell you so the next morning; but then you had left. I was so sorry not to be given an opportunity of telling you then, and therefore do so now.

"We are looking forward to seeing you again. Father says that he hopes he will be able to take another trip up in your beautiful woods next summer; and he is anticipating being able to persuade you to

join our party. Anyhow, we should all of us be very pleased to see you, if you should happen to come to New York.

"Sincerely yours,
"MARION MORGAN."

"Well, well!" thought Weston, more than surprised. "That girl has got her good points after all. Her apology for her deplorable outburst that time is, of course, a little screened and reserved; but still, it is an apology, of sorts. Deuced nice of her, I think. I must say it was the last thing I expected her to do; but, then, girls are rummy. You never know where you have them."

Having unearthed this ponderous nugget, he placed the letter on his desk and attacked the remainder of his mail.

The next letter he picked up furnished the second surprise. As was the case with the first envelope this also bore the New York stamp. But in this case the handwriting was masculine, and well known to him. In fact, the address was written in the neat caligraphy of his uncle, the Earl of Ernemount. He quickly opened the envelope, wondering what his uncle was doing on this side of the Pond.

The first lines gave him the explanation. His uncle had never visited America before, and had decided to pay a visit to that country of hustle and high-speed activities. Incidentally, he also wanted to see at first hand how his nephew and heir was getting along. And Weston was very pleased at the prospect of receiving a visit from his uncle. He had always been fond of him, and he had been the only one of all his relatives who had not passed any adverse remarks that time, years ago, when he had voiced his decision to go to Canada and join the Mounted Police.

But on the second page of his uncle's letter Weston came across a passage which made him give way to a sudden and undignified burst of laughter. The sudden outburst so startled Sergeant Wilson that it caused him to make an ink-blot on a voucher he was preparing. He lifted his head sharply, and threw a

wondering glance across at his superior officer and friend.

"It is all right, Wilson," reassured Weston, controlling himself with an effort. "I only laughed at something funny in this letter; but it is not for publication, I'm sorry to say."

"Sorry, sir," mumbled Wilson, again bending to his task, as he realized that the dramatic possibilities of the situation were exhausted as far as he was concerned. And he commenced to brood on the problem of how to scientifically remove the ink-blot without damaging any of the figures with which it had become intimately entangled.

This was the passage which had provoked Weston's outburst:

"The other night I dined with a chap whom I met at Biarritz a couple of years ago. I ran across him the other day at the club where I have been put up; and he carried me off to his place for dinner one day. He is a millionaire of some kind. I heard one chap at the club refer to him as the Banana King. You know him, as a matter of fact. Morgan is his name, and he told me that he had spent some time with you up in the Canadian forests last summer. I happened to mention in the course of the conversation out at his place, that I was going up to Portage Bend to visit a scamp of a nephew who was in the Mounted Police up there. And their pertinent inquiries soon laid bare my dark secret.

"You seem to have spent a hectic time up there, judging from what I was told. Anyhow, Morgan and his wife—a dear soul—seemed to consider you a kind of combination of a Sir Galahad and an Admirable Crichton. They all seemed highly surprised to hear that you were my nephew and heir—especially the daughter, who struck me as a very beautiful girl; though she seemed a mite too self-possessed and sophisticated to my old-fashioned English eyes. . . ."

It was at this point that Weston's laughter had jeopardized Wilson's carefully-prepared voucher.

Now he understood her letter. He was not unacquainted with the idolatrous fascination which the Old World aristocracy seemed to exert over members of the greatest and staunchest democracy in the world. Miss Morgan's apology was directed to the heir to the Earl of Ernemount, and not to that obscure individual, Richard Weston. Now he was shining in reflected glory. He had risen to lofty heights, and was a bit of a nut and a good egg in the girl's eyes, he reflected with frank glee. He would write her a letter simply flowing over with milk and honey. She deserved it for her brazen gall, he ended his self-communion with a grin, as he once more picked up his uncle's letter, and continued the perusal:

"I intend to leave here on Friday," wrote his uncle. "That should get me to Portage Bend on the following Wednesday. Or so, at least, a young gentleman at the travelling bureau assured me. He had some trouble finding the place at first; and seemed concerned when he discovered that it could only be reached via a branch-line with trains running three times per week only. Out of the kindness of his heart he hinted to me that it might be advisable for me to take along camp equipment and provisions; as it would be very doubtful if any fitting accommodations could be found in such an out-of-the-way place. He looked very sceptical when I informed him that to the best of my knowledge and belief there existed both hotels and shops up there. He shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes seemed emphatically to convey the ominous message: 'On your own head be it; I have done my duty!'"

Weston grinned at this; but he frowned over his closing remarks:

"With regard to your carefully-worded, but quite transparent, innuendoes, that I may relieve you of the, it seems unwelcome, prospect of succession by perpetrating matrimony, I regret to have to disappoint you. The direct line was definitely broken

when poor James died, so you had better get used to the idea that in due course you will have to step into my shoes. And I will say that for you, Richard, that I am convinced that you will make a worthy successor.

"Yours very sincerely,

"ERNEMOUNT."

Weston cogitated over this last paragraph. Dash it! Why can't uncle be reasonable? Anyhow, he reflected more cheerfully some moments later, if the worst came to pass, it would be a fair number of years before the question would become pressing. His uncle had always been a careful liver, and ought to be able to reach a ripe age. And, of course, there was always the prospect of the old boy changing his mind. Well, time would tell! And he broke off his reflections on personal matters to delve into the work of the day.

On the following Wednesday Weston, dressed in mufti, stood on the platform, watching a wheezy, dejected-looking old engine haul three dilapidated day-coaches into the depot. When the engine had at last come to a standstill with a few pathetic blasts of defiance, which deceived no one, he let his eyes sweep rapidly along the coaches for a glimpse of his uncle. But when his glance reached the end coach it became fixed. He drew in his breath sharply, and stood for a few seconds as if turned to stone.

As he stared with unbelieving eyes at the trim figure of the girl who was alighting, he forgot his uncle, his surroundings, everything else but the object to which his eyes were glued.

He soon regained his power of movement, and hurried forward just as the girl's eyes met his over the heads of the crowd. He saw her smile and wave her hand; and his forward movement forthwith became a rush, to the annoyance of several innocent loungers who blundered across his path. Some of these unintentional stumbling-blocks were inclined to take umbrage at the human catapult till they discovered his identity. But discovery acted as a sedative to their ruffled spirits, and left the victims shaking their

heads sadly. This, reason told them, was decidedly a case where discretion was the motto.

"Betty!" cried Weston when he got up to where she was standing beside her suit-case on the platform. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, Dick," she smiled, her cheeks pink. "I have come back, you see. I am going up to the Narrows again."

"Did you . . . did you . . . ?" commenced Weston; but suddenly he discovered that their surroundings were perhaps a little too public for private exchanges of confidences. "Oh, say. We can't talk here," he continued hurriedly. He grabbed her suit-case with one hand, and her arm with the other, and propelled her through the crowd pressing around the train. He led her around the station building, and found a vacant spot in front of the gable end. He promptly dropped the suit-case and faced her squarely.

"Did you receive my letter?" he asked abruptly, with that desperate determination with which a man dives into icy water.

She nodded her head, her eyes searching the ground, while the colour in her cheeks heightened.

"And . . . and . . . ?" stuttered Weston, frantically groping around in his mind for words that would not sound trite or commonplace; but drawing a blank. Evidently Betty seemed to be able to fill in the blanks, however, for she looked up at him through lowered eyelashes, a smile playing about her mouth.

"That's why I came, to . . . to give you my answer in person. And . . . and I also wanted to see you again," she answered softly.

"You . . . you mean that . . ." he began; but again his vocabulary hung fire. But he evidently had an intelligent audience, for Betty's eyes again sought the ground while she nodded her head.

Her evident confusion acted on Weston as a kind of antidote; and he once more began to feel his own masterful self, his diffidence and trepidation completely evaporated. And he decided on the spot that direct methods were indicated. He threw a rapid glance around him; and before Betty had realized his inten-

tions he had folded her firmly in his arms and had kissed her. He immediately released her; and she stepped back a pace.

"Dick!" she exclaimed, her happy smile belying the reproach in her voice, her face a riot of colour. "How could you, with such a lot of people about. Somebody might have been looking!"

"Nobody was," he grinned, unabashed. "I had a quick peep before I went into action. And if somebody did happen to see, who cares? I feel so happy, I don't grudge anybody a modest share in my happiness. And to think that you love me. I can hardly believe it yet. And did you love me already up at camp?"

"Of course I did, Dick," smiled Betty. "I really think I fell in love with you the first time I saw you. I thought you were such a dear when . . . No! Not again in this public place!" she interrupted herself hurriedly, as Weston showed signs of further direct attacks.

He grinned; but kept himself in order.

"And to think that I was walking around up at the camp being miserable, when you cared all the time," he regretted, shaking his head sadly. "If I had only told you then."

"But you did tell me, Dick," she interposed with a provoking smile.

"I told you?" queried Weston, his face puckered in frank, incredulous bewilderment. "When?"

"The night you were so delirious. In the intervals between cursing persons unknown, and dogs and things, you were busy saying nice things about me, and . . . and . . . Well, everything," she ended, laughing at the expression of abashed confusion on Weston's face.

"If I had only known," he moaned, taking a firm grip on himself. "Then I should . . ."

But the record of his intended heroics will be lost to the world for ever. He suddenly broke off on hearing steps crunching the cinders beside him. Turning quickly he found himself face to face with a tall, upright man in a soft hat and a well-cut suit of tweeds.

He looked like an older edition of Weston himself, only the new-comer wore a close-cropped moustache, and the hair over his eyes was shot with streaks of grey. A pair of keen, but good-natured, eyes looked out of a pleasant, healthy face.

"Surely it is Richard," he said, removing his hat.

"Uncle!" shouted Weston, grabbing his hand. "Good Lord! I had forgotten all about you!"

"So I seemed to gather," answered his uncle dryly, his eyes twinkling.

"You must excuse me, uncle," pleaded the nephew. "But I am in a bit of a dither this morning. This is my fiancée, Miss Elliott, uncle," he proudly effected the introduction, indicating the blushing girl.

"How-do-you-do?" said Lord Ernemount, taking the girl's hand in his, his shrewd eyes quietly appraising her. Then he smiled, and Betty decided on the spot that she liked him. "Well, well! This is certainly a country of surprises. I go out to visit a nephew, and find that I have a niece as well. But you never told me you were engaged to be married, Richard!"

"I wasn't till quite recently," grinned Weston. "We'll tell you all about it by and by. But what about your luggage, uncle? Haven't you got any bags or something?" he inquired, eager to make amends for his former neglect of his relative.

"Yes. I had a couple of bags. And when I discovered that you were missing, I approached a young gentleman in red tunic and Stetson hat—one of your men, I presumed—and asked him for information about you. He introduced himself as Sergeant Wilson; volunteered the information that he had seen you move off in this direction with a lady; and further offered to look after my bags for me while I went to hunt for you. He was a very obliging young chap."

"Wilson is. And he doesn't miss much either, evidently. And here he comes."

Wilson had just rounded the corner of the building, and was approaching them with a bag in each hand and a huge grin on his face.

"How-do-you-do, Miss Elliott?" he greeted her, after having dumped the bags on the ground.

"Let me introduce you to the future Mrs. Weston," cried the inspector boyishly.

At that Wilson's grin threatened to split his face.

"Congratulations!" he shouted, grabbing Betty's hand, and pump-handling it vigorously, until she was sorely afraid that her much-abused arm would be torn out of its socket. Then he let go of her hand and turned to Weston to repeat the performance; but brought himself up sharply as sudden realization came to him. He clicked his heels together, and raised his hand to his hat.

"May I be allowed to tender my congratulations, sir," he said formally, his smile being totally eclipsed by an expression of embarrassment. He had been on the very verge of committing a severe breach of etiquette in public!

"Good Lord, Wils!" laughed Weston, grabbing his subordinate's hand and putting in some good work in the pumping line himself. "Let's drop official etiquette, red tape, ceremonial, etcetera, on this mad and happy morning."

"Right you are, Wess! Congrats, old man!" cried Wilson, the grin again blossoming forth in full glory. "I am awfully glad, and all that. Though I have had my suspicions since that time up at camp."

"Then you possess a very wonderful intuition, my lad; and ought to set yourself up as a fortune-teller," was Weston's dry comment. "However, we can't stand talking here all day. Give me your checks, Betty and uncle, and I'll go and arrange to have your heavy luggage sent up to the hotel. You two can look after Betty in the meantime."

"Not at all!" protested his uncle firmly. "You two stay here, and I am sure that Sergeant Wilson will be kind enough to come along with me, and help arrange about the luggage."

"Certainly, sir," declared Wilson with alacrity. "Please come along, and we'll have everything arranged in a jiffy. I had better take these bags and things too; and then it can all be sent up together."

The two disappeared, Wilson carrying Lord Ernemount's two bags, the latter insisting on carrying Betty's suit-case.

"Who is your uncle, Dick?" asked Betty, as soon as the others were out of earshot. "You forgot to tell me his name."

"He's Lord Ernemount," answered Weston.

"Lord Ernemount? Do you mean that he is an honest-to-goodness English lord?"

"Sure," grinned Weston, amused at her surprise. "But he ain't wearing his coronet to-day. He is the Right Honourable the Earl of Ernemount with a string of letters behind his name, to give him his official title. And that reminds me," he chuckled. "I am his heir-apparent and successor; so you stand a fair chance of becoming a countess some day."

She looked at him, her eyes wide with surprise.

"You are joking, Dick," she gasped at last.

"Indeed I'm not. I have gently suggested to uncle to remarry and start a family of his own, to let me out of it. But he doesn't seem to see things my way just yet. But I have hopes for the future."

"But, Dick, this is impossible!"

"What is impossible, dear?"

"I can't marry you if you are to be an earl some day. I wouldn't be the right kind of wife for you then."

Weston threw back his head and laughed joyously.

"Wouldn't you though! You would just make the finest and sweetest countess going. Anyhow, don't shy at a shadow. Uncle may come to see things my way some day, and you may still have to end your days as plain Mrs. Weston. And, whatever happens, it will be a long time yet before I dazzle the House of Lords with my eloquence. Uncle doesn't look as if he is going to wilt in the near future, does he? But all that is immaterial. What interests me more is this: when are we going to get married?"

"Oh, Dick," murmured Betty, confused and blushing. "We can't get married for some time yet."

"Oh, can't we! We can and we shall! We have wasted enough time already. Will next week do?"

"But, Dick!" she protested. "That is quite impossible. And you seem to forget that I am on my way up to Beaver Narrows."

"That's a thing you had better forget; because you aren't going," answered Weston firmly and masterfully. "The crowd up there can come down here; Tootles and all. There is nothing for Allan to do up there during summer. And they will have to be down for the wedding, anyhow."

"But, Dick," pleaded Betty, "you don't seem to take into consideration that even if I don't go to Beaver Narrows there will be an awful lot of things to get ready. It'll take months. And, besides, father and mother will want to have a say in the matter."

"I suppose so," sighed Weston, determined to be fair all around. "We had better write to them straight away and ask them to get busy. I'll tell you what!" he exclaimed, brightening. "We'll ask them to be kind enough to hustle the wedding along a bit, to give uncle an opportunity of being present. That's a good wheeze! It could all be arranged for next month. What say you?"

"Oh, well," she smiled. "You are absolutely hopeless, of course. But I suppose you will have your own way. And if father and mother agree, I suppose it could be arranged. But that will mean that I'll have to go back home almost at once to get ready."

"We can't have everything in this sad, weary world, I suppose," sighed Weston. "So I suppose I'll have to agree to that under the circumstances. But here is uncle coming back."

"Sergeant Wilson told us to go on up to the hotel, and he would get the luggage collected, and see that it got up safely," remarked Lord Ernemount as soon as he had joined them. "Well, my dear," he continued, turning to Betty, "I have hardly had time to look at you yet. Betty is your name, isn't it? I always gave Richard credit for possessing good sense, and I perceive that he is still living up to my opinion of him." At which subtle compliment Betty blushed again. She found that blushing was a thing she could do really well this morning.

On their way up to the Palace, Weston briefly explained their immediate future plans to his uncle, who was in hearty agreement.

Having entered the hotel office, and stepped up to the desk, Weston announced to the clerk:

"This is my uncle, Jack."

"Pleased to meet you. Any relative of the inspector's is sure welcome around here," he said handsomely, holding out a hospitable hand.

"Thank you very much," smiled Lord Ernemount, as he heartily shook Jack's hand. "I had better sign the register, I suppose?"

"Right here, please."

Jack watched the new guest write "Ernemount" in the space indicated, then he looked up and became aware of the girl.

"Well, well!" he cried. "If it ain't Miss Elliott! Welcome to our city, miss. You all right?"

"Quite, thank you," she smiled, shaking hands. "I also want a room."

"That's sure fine. I have got a couple of the best rooms vacant. You had better take twenty-two, and I'll give you twenty-four, Mr. Ernemount. They's easily the two best rooms in the hotel."

They all smiled at Jack's novel form of addressing an English peer; and, having thanked him, they turned and commenced climbing the stairs, Weston volunteering to show them their rooms.

Shortly after they had disappeared, Wilson entered the office.

"Hey, Jack!" he shouted. "Which are Miss Elliott's and Lord Ernemount's rooms? I have got a pile of luggage for them on a van outside."

"Lord who, did you say?"

"Lord Ernemount. The inspector's uncle, you know."

Jack champed his chewing-gum in reflective silence for a moment.

"Say, is Weston's uncle a lord?"

"You said it. He is the Earl of Ernemount."

"You ain't pullin' my leg by any chance?"

"'Course I am not, you chump!"

Again Jack cogitated, his teeth making soft, rhythmical clicks as he diligently ground the gum between them.

"Well," he remarked at last, "I never had much use for earls an' dooks, an' things like that. But I guess they ain't so dusty after all, when you get to know 'em closer. Anyhow, Weston's uncle looks a regular guy, lord or no lord!"

And having paid that handsome tribute to the English aristocracy, he deftly turned his gum over in his mouth with a click of finality, and set about arranging for the disposal of the luggage.

THE END

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